

I Am

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

The original plan for this week was to begin to cover the final chapter of the Highway of Holiness. As I was meditating, however, on the chapters we have done so far, particularly the ones we went over during last month's feast, I was inspired to present a relatively short study on what is actually a most important subject.

What I want to talk about is overcoming sin. We have spoken, of course, about victory before. We have spoken about the need for it. We have spoken about the way to obtain it. We have spoken about sanctification, which is the lifelong experience of maintaining it. We have talked about its effect in the life, to completely convert the outlook while here on earth, and to prepare the soul for everlasting glory.

These are big concepts, of course, and important for us to know. But what is equally important is looking at these grand doctrinal ideas on a very practical, a very small-scale level. What are the "actions" of a victorious life? Well, let's just start there. I will say, and this might surprise some people, that the actions of a victorious life are not the most relevant issue for the Christian. Each of us have different callings. Each of us has a ministry to perform. Some of us are married, some have children, and we live in different parts of the world.

Naturally, our actions will differ based upon circumstances and events. What is more important, then, is this question: "What are the thoughts of a victorious life?"

We speak of perfecting Yahshua's character, but we do not speak of becoming Yahshua. We speak of having His life in us, and His Spirit filling us, but we do not claim – as some who have gone off the narrow road – to become Him in any sense other than to represent His personality in our own experiences. But what do we claim? Well, we have seen this verse before, which tells us what we are to claim:

"But we have the mind of Christ." (1Cor 2:16)

In another place, speaking about this concept in relation to unity, Paul says:

"That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify Yahweh, even the Father of our Lord Yahshua the Messiah." (Rom 15:6)

And in another place, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord, Yahshua the Messiah, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1Cor 1:10)

Over and over again we can find verses like this. While we are to maintain our individuality, while our actions and preferences will be different, we must have "one mind." We must have the one "mind of Christ," and that mind is one that glorifies Yah with all that it does, and all it thinks.

The thoughts of a victorious life lead to the actions of a victorious life; and even if those actions may depend upon our situation and circumstances, the thoughts that LED to those actions are the same.

We, in our teachings and studies and sermons, are really teaching the people of Yah how to think according to the divine nature. To me, this is an exciting and important idea. Paul writes, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto Yah, which is your reasonable [i.e., sensible, logical] service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of Yah.” (Rom 12:1, 2)

Those two verses right there sum up the idea I have been expressing so far, that we are to learn the “thoughts” of the Father and Son, and then the actions will follow. I want to keep going for a few more verses, however, because we will see the promise that is fulfilled to us, and in us, as we do this, as we let the glory of Yah’s Spirit transform our minds:

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry [i.e., “service”, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching, or he that exhorteth, on exhortation. He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Rom 12:3-8)

These verses contain many promises of which we ought to be thankful, with rejoicing. We see that, as we let our minds be transformed, as we learn and claim the “thoughts” of the victorious life, we begin to reveal the fruit of the spirit in our lives. Just from the passage above, we see written humility, spiritual gifts like prophecy and service, generosity, diligence in leadership, mercy and cheerfulness. These things all refine, and perfect, the actions of the life in which these principles exist.

This, so far, is the “big idea.” This is the goal, and the method, on the level of doctrine and faith. But as I said, these remain only goals, and ideas, unless we apply the very practical steps associated with these things to our daily lives.

And again, this is the work of the ministry, to teach Yah’s people “how” to think. It is not so much “what” to think, because our own thoughts come from our will, and our individual relationship with the Father and Son. But the transformation of the direction and kind of thoughts, from earthly to divine, this is learned by the believer in the school of Christ.

What are some of the tools we have, that instruct us in this way? We have quite a few. We speak of the basics – those things that any Church teaches. We speak of prayer, of Bible study, and of meditation. As Adventists, we further speak of caring for the health of the body, for we do not deny the connection between physical, mental, and spiritual health.

As Creation Seventh Day Adventists, we have more refined tools still. We speak of claiming the promises that Yah has given to us. We speak of adopting a pure speech, and a testimony that we “have overcome the world.” Whereas other religious groups stop short of this, for Satan has deceived them that

it is arrogant, and prideful, to faithfully claim the very things our Father has promised us, CSDAs say, “Speak with an invincible faith, for as that faith, so it shall be unto you.”

I have never heard, in any other Church, the testimony, “I do always those things that please my Father.” I have never heard, anywhere else, the statement, “I have overcome the world.” I haven’t seen faith in any other body claiming to be Christ’s, which lays claim to the statement that, “I do not commit sin.”

But I have seen this faith among us, and I have heard these things. By these things we teach ourselves, and others, the thoughts of the Father and Son. The world needs to hear them more often, brethren, therefore we pray for many and more opportunities to share this testimony with others, that they may believe it, and be saved. It was a testimony of these things that brought me, and each one of you, to this place. And it is this testimony that will cause us to endure to the end.

Those quotations I gave above, that I have said that CSDAs say, but no others, these are all statements that Yahshua made while He was on earth. I do not recall if He ever said, “I do not commit sin,” in those words, but He did say to His accusers, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” The meaning is the same.

It is significant, though, that we are given a testimony that is identical to those things that Yahshua said when He was on earth. Indeed, in us it is fulfilled that we bear the “testimony of Yahshua.” Just like the faith of Yahshua, it is not the testimony (or the faith) ABOUT Yahshua, it is the testimony OF Yahshua. It is the faith that He had, and the testimony that He gave.

If we do not speak as He spoke, we are “none of His,” because our thoughts are not like His thoughts.

But one of the things He said, and this is the reason for the name of tonight’s study, is “I am.” This needs very careful explanation, because, while we are “like unto” the Son of Yah, for “we shall be like Him” in His glorified form at the end, (1John 3:2) there is a difference in His being from all who were created.

I will explain what I mean by this, and how it relates to the thoughts of a victorious life. Let me start with the verses from which I drew that quotation:

“Then said the Jews unto Him, ‘[...] Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? And the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?’

“Yahshua answered, ‘If I honour myself, my honour is nothing; it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say that he is your God. Yet ye have not known Him; but I know Him; and if I should say, “I know him not,” I shall be a liar like unto you. But I know Him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.’”

“Then said the Jews unto him, ‘Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?’

“Yahshua said unto them, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.’

“Then took they up stones to cast at Him, but Yahshua hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.” (John 8:52-59)

The questions that the Jews asked Yahshua, though they spoke of Abraham and the prophets, really boiled down to this: “Who are you?” When Yahshua answered them, He gave an answer that they, being Hebrew, and familiar with the Scriptures, fully understood. He said, “I am.”

This answer enraged them, so that they cast aside all propriety, all care about the people around them, and they would have killed Him on the spot. Through His answer, Yahshua did what He had done many times before in their presence. He had put Himself in the place of Yah, as one who could forgive sins, and raise the dead... and now here He was, testifying that He was the eternal fulfillment of the patriarch Abraham’s hope for a Messiah, a Savior.

Furthermore, He did so in the most dramatic way, by claiming the very name of the Father – I AM, “Yahweh.” I have called this study “I am,” because it is the name of our Father, and it is a part of the name of the Son. It is also, if you can receive it, a part of all of our names as well.

I have spoken often about how helpful the “little teachings” of our faith are. I maintain the belief that one of the most important teachings I received while new to the faith was something that we touched on during our review of The Highway of Holiness during the feast. Specifically, it is the teaching that we never say, “I am...” followed by something that is not in line with the promises of Scripture.

We have explained it that “I am” identifies us AS the thing we claim. And yes, it is that, but more than that as well. I submit that it is, in fact, a matter of taking upon ourselves a “new name.” Remember, our Father is the one who names us (both individually and corporately) and this is the reason why we understand a desire to use civil force to “rename” us is an act of the Beast. It is a rejection of the Father’s authority every bit as much as changing the sacredness of Sabbath to Sunday would be a rejection of His authority.

But we can become “Sundaykeepers,” rejecting the Father’s authority over us, in other, more gradual, ways. If we say, “I am...” followed by something that was not promised to us, that was not given to us, we are giving ourselves a new spiritual name, and one not in harmony with everlasting life. This may seem like a small thing, brethren, but remember that “for every idle word” we must give an account. Yah desires for us to become like Him. And if, as it is written, His Word never returns unto Him void, but always accomplishes that which He intends for It, what does that say about us, who have been restored to His image? Let us never send out a word without divine intentions, for it will not return unto us void, but will certainly accomplish its purpose, whether a blessing or a curse.

Now, practically, we know how this works, because we have been taught how to think with regard to this issue. We have been instructed that “I am” something blessed, and wonderful, and holy, whereas due to circumstances I may “feel” something temporary, and subject to the limitations and chemistry of our mortal flesh.

But what I am saying now is this: let us apply it to victory over sin as well. Let us use this doctrine, this naming of ourselves, this blessing of ourselves, toward the perfecting of Christian character, and the casting away of all traces of sin from our lives.

We have been taught to say, “I am,” that which is blessed, but “I feel” that which we experience in time. How do we apply this to sin? It is very simple. If we find a sin, and we repent of it, we are to put it away

from us forever. This means, it is not sufficient for us to say the following, although they seem good on the surface:

“I will not do that again.”

“I will be more careful in the future.”

“I will change my actions.”

Even if we make them present, they are still not yet perfect.

“I have given up that transgression.”

“I no longer do that sin.”

If you look at those statements, there is nothing “wrong” with them, necessarily. This may be the clearest way to express those ideas in words. But there is a common thread there, which Satan might use to exploit weaknesses of character that are yet undetected if they are not paired with divine thoughts. These statements, faithful as they may be, still speak about actions, and not thoughts. This ties in to what I was talking about at the very beginning.

Remember, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, not the adjusting of our habits. The adjustment of our actions comes from the mental changes. It is the thoughts that we must, at times of repentance, pledge to the Most High, and this involves renewing our “names” in Him.

Instead of, “I do not commit this sin,” the truth is that, in Christ, “I am not someone who can commit this sin.”

Instead of, “I am changing my actions,” the truth as it is in Yahshua is that, “I am a new creature in Christ, whose actions are in harmony with the will of Yah.”

As we have said in previous studies, it is not about what we do, it is about who we are.

You see, these statements are about who each of us “Am.” It is about who each of us are in Christ. It is not about what we do, but who we have become, and who we have covenanted to remain. And because of who we are, to which each of us can testify by giving our spiritual name, “I am,” our actions, and habits, and manner of life, follows from cause to effect.

While it is certainly TRUE that, “I no longer do that sin,” whatever the sin is we might be discussing, it is important to our testimony that we explain why. Even if we do not express it outwardly at every time we speak of it, it is important for US to testify to the truth of ourselves and for ourselves. Even our most commonly used verse about victory over sin includes this idea. “Whosoever is born of Yah doth not commit sin, for His Seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (1 John 3:9)

When I read that verse, with the ideas from tonight’s study in mind, I see a deeper meaning than even the powerful promise on the surface. Yes, I do not commit sin. But why do I not commit sin? It is because the Son of Yah lives in me. And what does that do? It makes ME someone different than I was in the flesh. It has transformed me into something else, a new creature. Now, “I am... like Christ.” Now, “I am... not one who commits sin.” Now, “I am... free from the death that I inherited in my first father’s

transgression.” Now “I am... a son of Yah.” Now, “I am... a partaker of the divine nature.” Now “I am... one who endures unto the end.” Those things are my spiritual name.

Brethren, this is how we receive and lay permanent claim to the promises of Yah. We do NOT just say, “Yes, I believe all those things.” No, no... it is not enough. We must claim them, not only for our own, not only for a part of our faith, but as a part of our NAME. I must claim them as a part of who “I am.” I must, and DO, claim them as a part of that spiritual “word” that identifies me uniquely in the universe, and that will be given to me in some form (we know not yet what) on the day that our bodies will be glorified. But, like everlasting life itself, I claim it now.

There are many things to consider, based on this little study tonight, and I am certain that, as we think about these things, and pray about them, and meditate on them, our Father will shed even more light, even more blessings, on our path. Let us go about, bearing the name of our Father in our foreheads.

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