

Joy in the Time of Sifting

Happy Sabbath to all.

For the past few weeks, we have been looking at the topic of “motivation.” We have been examining the reason why Christians do what they do. We, as members of the 144,000, will have a perfect motive for the things that we do, because – we discover through Yahshua – the Spirit of Yah, and the decision to receive and give agape love, constrains us to act in a certain way. Specifically, we will act in the way that best serves our fellow men, and best supports and promotes that work of Heaven designed to lead them to everlasting life.

In this way, we really cannot separate the ministry, the work of the Church, with “Christianity” in its true and life-giving form. In worldly religions, there is something of a “divide” between Christ and His Church; however, the Bible says that they cannot be separated in the hearts of those who would seek Yah’s favor. To be united with one is to be united with the other, because this is the way the Spirit works, it is a spirit of Binding Together. Genesis tells us, and Yahshua confirms, “And [Yahshua] answered and said unto them, ‘Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?’”” (Mat 19:4, 5)

In Mark’s Gospel, this is added: “And [the husband and wife] shall be one flesh; so then they are no more twain, but one flesh,” (Mark 10:8) and the Apostle Paul gives yet another witness in Ephesians 5:31.

Paul, then, continues this analogy toward Christ and His Bride, saying, “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church, for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph 5:29-32)

It is truly a marvelous thing that our Father has integrated aspects of His personality into the human experience, so that marriage, for example, provides insight into His character – and for this cause any deviations from the Biblical pattern, such as homosexuality and polygamy (although the latter was allowed for a time due to social factors) ultimately harms the mind’s perception of the Father and Son. These two that I have mentioned are deviations in the flesh. There are also deviations in the spirit that are accepted by Churches all over the world, where the covenant of membership is not taught as a part of the Gospel.

Many churches teach that one may be a follower of Christ without the need for baptism, or – more commonly – that baptism is merely “into Christ,” but not into “Christ and His people.” The Scriptures tell us that those who were baptized under the ministry of the apostles were “baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” (1Cor 12:13)

Thus, true baptism is “in” the name of Yahshua, but “into” the Body of Yahshua, which is the united fellowship of the saints. Those who teach we can be independent atoms, and yet faithful to Christ, teach contrary to the Scriptures, and are neither preparing others to stand in the final judgment, nor are they ready themselves to face the Master in peace.

From the moment the Church existed, it was called the “Bride of Christ,” and It and Christ were, in the words recorded by Mark, “no more twain.” They are no more “two” but “One,” and this is the plan established with divine intelligence for the sanctification of the believers.

The members of the Covenant, of the Church, are consequently members of Christ’s Body, with whom He is one; and it is only in this context that the last prophecies, and last promises, can be fulfilled toward those seeking eternal life.

One of these prophecies, one of these promises, deals with the nature of the Church and its members right before the very end. Yahshua says this of His people through the Old Testament prophet Amos, “For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.” (Amos 9:9)

The promise is as beautiful as the symbol is powerful.

You know, the word “sift,” and variations of that word appear in only three verses of the Bible. Two are in the Old Testament, the first of which being Isaiah 30:28. This speaks of Yah sifting “the nations,” but in Amos’ Book the idea is expanded. It is true that all the nations will be sifted, but Israel – who are the representatives of Yah – are sifted “among all nations.” Putting these two ideas together, we find that the nations are sifted, are shifted and shaken, in order for those who are truly of Israel to rise to the surface for harvest.

Now, some might look at these verses and say, “Wait a minute. Doesn’t this idea, that the ‘sifting’ will reveal the true citizens of Spiritual Israel, go against the idea that membership in the Covenant is an identifying characteristic of the saints?” After all, it might be reasoned, the sifting would be redundant if the Covenant already tells us who they are. But there is absolutely no conflict between these two ideas. In fact, we can demonstrate that by means of the third and final appearance of the word “sift” in the Bible, the New Testament passage:

“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.’” (Luke 22:31, 32)

Simon Peter was a member of Yahshua’s earthly ministry. He was one of the foremost apostles, and one of the most visible of Yahshua’s followers. He was in the covenant, certainly, and yet Yahshua said, “Satan wants to sift you out. You are not yet safe. You have yet to be converted.” What does this mean?

It is really quite simple. We know that Satan is the “god of this world.” We know that the “whole world” bows before the Beast and his image. The “default” situation as a human being in this age of sin is to be under the dominion of Adam’s fall, and thus subject to death. It is those, however, who purpose to stand against the Beast and its mark through the indwelling power of Yahshua, they are the ones who join the covenant. They are the ones who are subject to the sifting mentioned in the Scriptures. They are the ones who are “tried” to see if they are gold, or merely base metal. They are the ones who will shine as lights before men, and to whom the promise is given, “not the least grain [shall] fall upon the earth.”

It is a powerful promise, but it is one that we must actively claim. But what does this mean for those “in the world?” They may have bad things happen to them, but that is not the sifting. They may (if they are

religious, and nominally Christian) interpret the events of their lives as trials for their purification, and obstacles allowed by Christ for them to overcome, but that is not really the sifting mentioned in the prophecies. If they are not even claiming victory over sin, why would Yah allow their testing to see if they truly have victory? If they are not even claiming to have perfect faith, why would Yah try that faith to see if it is indeed perfect? This may be a hard saying for those who believe they are faithfully following Yahshua, and yet know nothing (or desire nothing) of the Church and its nature; but they must know their true condition or their eyes will never be opened.

You see, brethren, the true sifting IS for the Church, for those in the true, Biblical Covenant, and while there may be misfortunes, and trials, and ups-and-downs in any nation, and in any religious organization, it is the Creation Seventh Day Adventist with his claims of victory, and with her claims of being Christ-like in nature, that is being tested in the sieve. This much is plain and obvious, for no other Church, no other covenant, even makes those claims. This is the connection between the Covenant and the sifting; those in the covenant are sifted, and those outside the covenant are not, although they may seem to be, because Satan would not have them awaken to the true nature of their condition - "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph 2:12)

May it be true of us, and our fervent prayer; may we accept it as being so, that not the least grain of us shall fall to the earth...

Now, similar things will befall those in the Church, and those in the world. Even the worst of open sinners will have trials, and if they are sufficiently misled they may even think, "God is testing my faith." This is where spiritual discernment is necessary, to know whether we are "in the faith." Merely being subject to trials is not evidence. Merely making claims is not evidence. We must be overcoming those trials through the power of Yahshua, and standing before the Father in judgment, and doing so (as we have been examining over the past few weeks) with the purest of motives, and then our nature, as true wheat for the Heavenly Barn, will be revealed.

Now, this should tell us what our reaction, what our attitude, what our mindset, should be with regard to the sifting. This is not a pleasant process, as we all know. Not all who have begun with us will prove to be faithful to Yahshua and His people unto the very end. Even within the Covenant, as Yahshua said to Peter, Satan desires to sift people, to shake them loose if they will tarry on his ground.

Satan knows that Yahshua protects His people from all that He can, and therefore only the most cunning, the most subtle, of temptations are reserved for those who make claims of being partakers of the divine nature, of being vessels for the Holy Spirit of Yah. Satan knows also that salvation, true salvation, is more a matter of nature than actions. He knows that the true Christians are faithful because of who they are, and not merely what they do. Thus, his most powerful temptations are those that seek to have the believer question his very nature, to ask himself, "Am I even truly wheat?"

You may recall the temptations that Satan used upon Yahshua Himself, saying, "If you truly are the Son of God..." The Enemy was trying to introduce to Yahshua doubt that He even was who He believed Himself to be. And he does the same thing with us, saying, "Did you ever even have true faith at all? Haven't you been pretending this entire time?"

I give voice to those temptations only because I know that Satan has been trying various ones with thoughts just like these, and to declare that the appropriate response to any suggestion such as this is immediate, complete denial. We must claim the promises Yah has given to us, just as Yahshua did, and assert our assurance (for faith is truly confidence in Yah's promises) that we ARE who we claim to be, that our testimony is true, and that we will not countenance or consider any suggestion to the contrary.

Those in the Covenant have the authority under Heaven to do this, and a responsibility to do so whenever such temptations arise.

So we all know, from personal experience, how unpleasant the sifting process can be – both to undergo ourselves, and to see in the lives of those whom we love. The temptations are intense, and were it not for the infinite power of our Father and His Son, we would be swept away without any hope of resistance. But in all these things, the Scriptures tell us how we are to be.

It is written: “But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice. Let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them; let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.” (Psalm 5:11)

“Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and let thy saints shout for joy.” (Psalm 132:9)

“Yet I will rejoice in Yahweh, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” (Hab 3:18)

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11)

“For the kingdom of Yah is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Rom 14:17)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.” (Gal 5:22)

I have just chosen very few of the many, many verses that contain the word “joy.” And there are as many again that contain words like “rejoice,” and others that use “joyful.” This is as clear a theme as any in the Bible, that the saint, the true follower of Yah, is a joyful person.

Now, we ought not to get carried away here... we know there is a ditch on the far side of the road with this. There are celebration churches, and even in Adventism a “celebration” movement that focuses on the joy without truly understanding the reason FOR that joy. We are not rejoicing that all is light, and beauty, and success in even worldly endeavors. We are rejoicing that there is an end to sin and suffering, that there is a conclusion to the plan of salvation in which righteousness is honored, and wickedness is destroyed.

We are rejoicing because the trials we now endure are a blessing for our sanctification, but we are currently IN these trials, and so our joy is, at times, muted by sorrows, and subdued by the process of the sifting. The celebration churches are not being sifted. They make no claims that Yah wishes to test. Those who glory in the things of this world are not being sifted, so their joy is without holiness, for they are merely happy when things go well, and sad when things do not.

But for the true Christian, “joy” is our very nature. It is, as Paul said, a part of the “fruit of the Spirit” which is always within us. Even in tears, we are aware of the blessing. Even in trials, we are confident of

Yah's guidance. We do not deny the tears, the sorrows, or the hardships. We do not pretend to be feeling happy when we are troubled; but we *feel* these things temporarily, while we *are* joyful always.

This is a very important distinction, and for me it is a very comforting one. We are being sifted, brethren, because each one of us in the Covenant has made certain claims, those written on our baptismal vow, and those things we have testified to the world and to one another. We are being sifted, and those around us are being distracted so that they will not even think to join the Covenant in the first place. Thus, our work is made doubly difficult, of winning hearts to Yahshua, and being sifted with them unto purification.

But in all these things, in all these things that we feel, the Scriptures have instructed us to be joyful. Now, this may seem strange. How do you "instruct" someone to be joyful? How do you dictate how someone is to feel? Well, as we asked in a previous study, "How can the first commandment be a commandment to 'love?'" The answer to this was a deeper understanding of love, that it is not merely an emotional state, but also a decision made by the sanctified will. We choose to love Yah, we choose to maintain that love, and we find that the love comes to us, and through us, and is perfected within us.

Similarly, brethren, we can choose to be joyful. We can choose to rejoice in Yah, even at the darkest of times, and in the face of the most brutal of trials. We can decide, through an act of sanctified will, and being empowered to do so by Yahshua and His Father's promises, "I will be joyful in this time of sifting," and we will find that we will receive joy from Yah, and we will express joy in our thoughts, and words and actions. And within us joy will be perfected.

Again, this is not an undisciplined, unsanctified joy. This is not a joy that is contrary to the solemnity of the judgment, or that is ignorant of the weight of our trials. It is a joy that gives meaning to those trials, and to that judgment, for it shows Satan, and the onlooking universe, that the unity we have with the Father and Son is sufficient for our happiness, even if everything else is stripped away. We, like Job, become mature Christians through our choice to be joyful, and our practice of joy, and then we will find that we cannot be overcome by Satan's most destructive temptations.

We cannot be overcome by depression, self-pity, or despair. We may feel sad in response to certain events, and we will acknowledge those feelings, but we will not fall into any destructive thoughts, or act in any way contrary to our faith, merely because we feel that sorrow. Even in the face of trials, sifting, and sadness, because we have joy, to quote our baptismal vow, "My mouth shall remain a sanctified mouth, my tongue a converted tongue. I will speak of God's goodness and praise His holy name."

These are the promises we have made, brethren, as members of this covenant, and this is one of the things we are being sifted to prove, whether we will remain true to that promise despite our trials and our troubles, to stand, as perfect wheat, before the Father, and live in His presence forever more.

Let us, therefore, choose to be joyful, to offer our reasonable service to our Father, and to be faithful even in this time of sifting. To conclude, let me share this verse with you, which reads, "I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things; and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee." (1Chron 29:17)

Are there any questions here as we close?