

The Step of Faith

Happy Sabbath to all.

I am particularly blessed at this appearing of our Father's time of rest, as it has been a busy week for me, and I appreciate this sacred time into which worldly matters cannot intrude. This is a time when I can come apart from my various labors, and spend time in the joyful contemplation of spiritual things. I pray that we are all, week to week, drawing closer and closer to Heaven in our thoughts and in our worship.

For tonight's study, I would like to discuss an idea called "The Step of Faith." There is a verse, well known to us, that reads as follows: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb 11:1)

This brings two ideas to mind, the first of which we have examined before.

Paul's primary meaning for writing this verse is that faith is a belief in the fulfillment of expectations; that is, it is the acceptance of things that we have "not seen" in the sense that we have not (yet) experienced them. This deals with such matters as believing the promises of Yah, understanding and benefiting from the prophetic writings, and being able to act when called for service. When our Father says, "Arise and go," to here or there, He does not always provide us with a detailed map of the events that will occur. It is necessary for us to agree with His judgment, and for us to develop trust in His guidance, and so at times He will present us with a work to accomplish without a full explanation.

One of the more dramatic examples of this principle in Scripture, primarily because it involves a literal "step" is found here:

"And Joshua said, 'Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of Yahweh, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.'

"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 [...] were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho.

"And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of Yahweh 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 3:10-17)

This was one of the most important signs that our Father gave to the nation of Israel at that time, not only because of what it meant then, but because of the greater degree of trust He required of them. Recall this incident recorded of the initial departure from Egypt:

"And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and Yahweh caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground, and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left." (Exo 14:21, 22)

In the earlier case, Yah caused the waters to recede, and then the people crossed over. In the second case, the people – led by the priests (this is significant) – had to begin the crossing procedure, and then the waters responded. In these last days the people of Yah are ALL called to be priests, and we are called to cross a river that will not part at all. We must, like Yahshua, walk over the water to get to the other side, as Peter did in the Gospels.

We see that as time proceeds to the end, and more light is revealed, our Father has required more faith, more confidence, from His children. When we read the records of the heroes of faith in the Scriptures, they are not there merely to be admired. They are there to be foundations from which we grow to maturity, and from which we go even further, unto perfection.

So then, faith is the substance of things hoped for in the future, and the evidence of things not yet seen, but accepted as promises that will be kept with divine integrity. Because of the confidence in the promises given to us – of safety, of peace, of victory, of everlasting life – we can overcome all obstacles that may be placed before us on our path to the completion of our sanctification.

There is another meaning, however, that we can take from this definition of faith in Hebrews. In addition to what I have said already, and which I think we all understand fairly well, we can take faith as “the evidence of things not seen” to mean the evidence of those PRESENT realities of which we have no experience through our senses. As the Scriptures tell us, “No man hath seen Yah at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” (John 1:18) Of the Kingdom it is written, “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O Yah, beside thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him.” (Isa 64:4)

Those are the things “not seen,” but what is the evidence? “Evidence” implies things that CAN be detected with our senses, or grasped through thoughts and reasoning. In this, it is “evident,” or observable. So then, what this passage is telling us is that we believe in the existence of things we cannot see, but based upon things that we can perceive.

For the Christian, the life of Christ as revealed through the Gospels is one of the best examples of evidence. His life was something observed, recorded, and then reported widely. We are not intending to go into all the “proofs” for the validity of the Scriptures here, but to point out the principle of how this works. Yahshua explained this in more than one place. Here is one such incident:

“Philip saith unto Him, ‘Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.’ Yahshua saith unto him, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, ‘Shew us the Father?’”

“‘Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works’ sake.” (John 14:8-11)

The apostles could not see the Father directly. They, like all men, were separated from the Father because of the sin of our first parents in Eden. Since that time, all the blessings from Heaven have come to us through agencies. The Father has wrapped Himself in darkness from our perspective, (Exo 20:21) and for our sakes, and until this day His contact with us has been through His angels, and through His Son.

But if they had seen Christ, and known His Person, then they have learned of the nature and character of the Father. “Yahshua answered and said unto him, ‘If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.’” (John 14:23)

Notice the wording. Yahshua said that if we love Him, both He and His Father will abide within us. It is not necessary to “come to know” the Father, separate from the Son. To know and love the One we can

see – or at least read the records of those who have seen Him – is to accept, know and love the One whom we have not seen. Without going too deeply into the failings of Catholicism (for example) on this subject, they teach that the Son is the “merciful one” holding back the wrath of the Father for our sakes. And further, that Mary is even more merciful and full of grace, so that if the Son would not be gracious to us, she may act on our behalf to plead our case. This may be taken by some Catholics as an (over) simplification of their doctrine, but in practice, this is how these matters are perceived, and believed, by their constituency.

Straight to the point, this is one of the most mean-spirited misrepresentations of the Godhead that the world can ever know. It is the Father who sent the Son to us because of His love. It is the Father who has withdrawn Himself from directly presenting Himself to us until we can withstand the light of His presence. It is the Father who watches eagerly, to see who will accept His Son; and then, when we have accepted His Son, He brings His love to us, and into us, so that we are transformed into His likeness. It is the Father who is Love Itself, and the Son is the perfect Image of this in human (visible, evidentiary) form. No created being, however obedient and faithful, can be compared to Them without losing entirely the distinction between the human and the divine. At the same time, we cannot compare the Father to the Son in terms of love or mercy without losing entirely the unity they share as revealed in the reality of the Holy Spirit.

It is not that we must plead with the Son to be accepted by the Father. Certainly, no angel or saint (in the worldly understanding of “saint”) is required for this process – in fact their inclusion corrupts it into meaninglessness, because it utterly destroys anything like an accurate understanding of the Father. The Son is the “evidence” of the Father’s invisible presence, and His boundless love. The Son is the visible representation of the mercy, and patience and lawfulness (for these cannot be separated) of the Almighty, and as we love Him, we love also the Father. There is NO separation between the two as far as love for us is concerned. There will be no need for a Mediator, for those who truly love the Son and become mature in His faith. Those who come to believe this, and to understand it, they are the ones who can stand before the Father without an intercessor in the time of trouble, and rejoice that the Father and Son are One – blessed, and loving, and peaceful, and merciful. Here, perhaps, is another dimension of the phrase “the faith of Yahshua,” for He is our evidence of the things not yet seen.

But accepting this takes a step of faith, to go, to “jump” from the evidence to the reality, to go from existing on the level of “senses” to being able to function on the level of “spirit.”

Here is another example of Yahshua demonstrating this point: “And again He entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that He was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door; and He preached the word unto them.

“And they come unto Him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto Him for the press, they uncovered the roof where He was, and when they had broken it up they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. “When Yahshua saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, ‘Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.’”

“But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?’”

“And immediately when Yahshua perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, He said unto them, ‘Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” or to say, “Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?” But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (He saith to the sick of the palsy) “I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.”’”

“And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw it on this fashion.’” (Mark 2:1-12)

It may be as easy to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” as “Take up your bed and walk.” The results, however, are not as easy to see. In other words, the people would not “know” that the man’s sins were forgiven him. There was no visible change in the man, and the people were not of such a spiritual sensitivity that they could tell whether or not any change had taken place in his spirit. But, so that He could give them “evidence” of this thing “not seen,” He performed a miracle of equal impossibility. He healed the man with a single command.

This kind of healing was beyond the abilities of any human being, and could only have been the result of divine intervention – the same kind that could (as they stated) forgive sin. Therefore, as Yahshua essentially said to His disciples in His earlier example, “Believe me because you recognize the presence of the Father in me; but if you cannot do that, at least believe me because the works that I do are divine.”

Now, this is good for those who are coming to the faith. They see miracles, they perceive truth, and they become convinced that the Gospel message is truth. For those who are to be the 144,000, however, it must go even further than this. Miracles, again, are good to draw the world close, because they need to be awakened before they can be taught. But at a certain point, it is not enough to believe in the works. It is not enough to follow along because we accept the record of the Gospel as accurate.

In modern terms, we could say, it is not enough to merely be convinced of a pastor or teacher’s doctrine, and then consent to be baptized. It may begin that way, but we must learn to know, for ourselves, how to recognize the Father in the Son, and in the Son’s representatives. As Yahshua said, we can find faith by believing in His works, but at some point we must make that “step” from the evidence to the reality. In a trial, or in science, evidence does not exist for its own sake, but in order to lead to a conclusion. The 144,000 are not those who merely accept the evidence; they are those who have followed the evidence and arrived at a conclusion. They have “ended” their searching, and are now perfect followers of the Lamb. They continue to grow in knowledge and understanding, as all intelligent beings do, but this all takes place in the context of a deeper understanding of how things work, rather than eliminating doubt or becoming “more sure” of Yah’s principles.

So, how does one come to that point? How does one make the “step of faith” to go from examining the evidence to making a firm conclusion? This is of relevance to those of us who discuss the “sealing,” the “settling into the truth” so firmly that we cannot be moved. This is really just another way of saying the same thing. If we have drawn a conclusion based on the evidence, then we are settled into our opinions, and fixed in our understanding.

Recently, one of us asked, essentially, “How do we tell when the thoughts that we have are of Yah, or of self?” This could be asked, “How we distinguish faith from presumption and natural inclinations?”

It is the knowledge of Yah that allows us to distinguish these things. It is not something so easily explained in a checklist, because many of our studies deal with the slight differences between the appearances of truth and error, and the craftiness with which Satan has attempted to blur the line between the holy and the unholy.

We can speak of studying the Scriptures, and prayer, and meditation. Ultimately, however, it is the Spirit of Yah in us that causes us to know. Yahshua said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) Now, He did not say how the sheep would hear His voice, or how they would distinguish His voice from those of the false shepherds. He did not say how they would know they were following Him. He merely states that we DO know His voice, and that we DO follow Him.

What does this mean? It means that this is one of those things that He invites us to know, and to accept by faith. It is something that His power will accomplish on our behalf if we will accept Him. As with the crossing of the Jordan, He says, “Hear my voice, and follow me.” Let me give you a practical example.

Some time ago, I don’t really recall the context, I heard someone explaining a supposedly Biblical point. He cited a “well known” story of shepherds in Biblical times that broke the legs of particularly adventurous lambs in order to keep them from straying too far from the flock, and falling prey to the wolves and lions. The shepherd would carry the wounded lamb around for a while, and eventually, when it was healed, it remained near the shepherd for the rest of its life. The study, or sermon went on to give an apparently beautiful message about how our Father will permit, or even cause, bad things to happen to us, in order to save us from worse disasters – and therefore we can rejoice even in our misfortunes, because we know that He is watching out for our best interests. I have found sermons online posted as recently as 2010, and studies on current Christian websites, which were based on this idea.

Now, I don’t know how that story strikes you, but for me, even though there was some face-value virtue to the principle, my spirit had an immediate reaction. I found the idea quite offensive. I wasn’t sure why at first. For one thing, I had never heard that record of such activities before; I couldn’t remember reading any verse actually IN the Bible where a shepherd did anything of the sort – but for me that was not the worst problem.

I know my Father in Heaven. I know His characteristics, and although He certainly does allow misfortunes to enter our lives so that we can overcome them, the idea of Him actually breaking a lamb’s leg to prevent worse disasters is – I can declare with confidence – not something He would ever do. There are several reasons for this, of which these three are probably the easiest to explain:

1) The sacrifices made unto Yah are to be whole. Yahshua was represented as the Passover Lamb, of which it was written, “neither shall ye break a bone thereof.” (Exo 12:46) John 19:36 applies this directly to the Savior. Yah is a Promoter of health, and wholeness, and bones in particular are symbols of principles unto which other things (flesh, organs, etc.) are based. The spiritual meaning of a broken bone is a violated principle, and we cannot become “unwhole” in order to obey the law, or else the law is proven to be invalid if it cannot be kept by an ordinary, whole, human being.

2) Breaking a lamb’s leg removes its freedom. In addition to the spiritual implications of a broken bone, on a purely physical level, the lamb is rendered unable to disobey at all. If Yah were to adopt this principle in dealing with human beings, He might just as well have never permitted the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden. At the very least, He could have restricted the snake from being able to tempt the woman. The true value in love and obedience is that they are freely given; those who are obedient because they CANNOT disobey are not really displaying any faith.

3) The Good Shepherd gives His life for His sheep. (John 10:11) The way that Yah deals with wandering sheep is to go after them. He sent Yahshua to earth to find us, and even to die on our behalf. The sheep learn obedience by observing the Shepherd, by acknowledging that their wandering has cost Him greatly.

Now, because this study bothered me, I decided to investigate. I found that there is, indeed, no such actual record in the Bible (or anywhere else) of any such act on a shepherd’s part. In fact, I found several websites where actual shepherds and animal specialists were explaining that breaking a lamb’s leg is just a step away from outright killing it. It is unable to function normally within the flock, even after it recovers, and the care it would require to be brought back to health would be at least as much trouble as training it to avoid danger in more practical, less violent, ways.

Incidentally (as a side note) I also read that the shepherd’s rod, his long pole-like weapon, was used solely to protect the sheep from predators. The actual rod of the shepherd was never used on the sheep itself,

only on the beasts that would attack them. It was the shepherd's staff, the shorter tool, that was used to guide the sheep while they were moving – by pulling, pushing or pressing, not by striking. Consider that in light of the tactics of certain groups that consider themselves to be “reformers” within Adventism under that symbolism.

In any case, some of the sermons that I read tried to justify their premise by citing verses such as this one: “And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the Lord, and He will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them.” (Isa 19:22) Clearly, however, Egypt is not to be represented symbolically as one of Yah's “lambs,” and should not be seen as any kind of “type” of the modern Christian believer. There have been times, no doubt, when “strange works” have been done, such as when the Levites slew many of Israel after the incident with the golden calf; but again, this does not apply that symbolism, because the purpose of that incident was to cleanse the camp of those who had gone beyond the bounds of grace, not to educate them (or the survivors, for that matter) at the point of a sword.

By this we can see how, by knowing Yah's principles, we can detect errors, even when they are cleverly worded, and even supported by (imperfectly applied) Scriptural quotations. There have been times, even in the Church, where one of us has said, “Yah has shown me that such a thing will happen,” or that some particular thing has happened. The temptation in some at times has been, “Were we also supposed to know this?” with the implied question, “Why didn't Yahweh show me this as well?”

For some things, for many things, we need to have individual discernment to distinguish truth from error. A large part of our sanctification is learning who Yah is, so we can know when He is not involved in a particular teaching, or plan. And yet there are times when it is the responsibility of the Body as a whole to make decisions and move in a certain direction. As I mentioned, this requires faith in the Father's presence in the Son, and in His earthly representatives.

As Paul so clearly explains it, not every member serves the same function. The Body has eyes to see, and ears to hear. It can receive information in that way, but it requires the hands to act, and the legs to walk. This is not to say that the eyes or the ears “tell” the hands what to do, because we do not have one member controlling another. This analogy is perfect, as deep as we would wish to go with it, because it is the Head controls everything. The eyes do not, and hands do not. But if Christ is in all, and through all, then we each act for ourselves, in the sense that Yahshua acts through us each directly, and it is not one man, or body of men, that controls this.

In truth, this is one of the key principles of Protestantism. Yahshua is the Head of all, and we all work together in different roles, serving Him, and expressing our individual gifts through this service. This is yet another way in which we can take a step of faith, going from seeing the actual, visible members performing works of faith within the context of religious duty, and then seeing the reality, the spiritual Body of Yahshua, the Bride of Christ, who is awaiting His soon return. We take the step of faith based upon our individual experience with Yahshua, but if we are truly His, and want to do all things perfectly, we do not do so without the benefit of the body's wisdom and fellowship either.

There are many things that I believe we can learn by a contemplation of these ideas, but I believe the foundation has been laid for prayers and thoughts on this topic. The step of faith signifies believing in the fulfillment of promises that are yet to come, and in drawing conclusions about invisible things from visible evidence. The testimony and record of Yahshua's life, death and resurrection is an example of that kind of evidence that leads to faith. In the first century, the evangelists would speak of these things, and on the strength of this testimony, souls were won for everlasting life. In this generation, with so many errors and falsehoods, it is important to remember that the things that win hearts and minds involve faith in what the Savior did for us, and that is a very simple message, a very fundamental message.

It is up to us, therefore, to be the priests of this exodus, and to step into the waters, and onto the waters, to show others how to go from evidence to conclusions, how to make that step of faith.

Are there any questions or comments as we close?