

## Who is “I”

Happy Sabbath to all.

As you can see from the room’s topic, tonight’s study is entitled “Who is ‘I.’” You might wonder if it is a grammatical or spelling error. Perhaps I meant to say, “Who am I?” or “Who is it?”

The title, however, is correct as it is written.

We recently had a study that dealt with a similar question: “Who am I?” It involved a discussion of the nature of conversion, specifically, what happens to the plans and intentions we had for our lives when we became a covenanted member of the Body of Christ. We saw that, however the world might define us, or however we may have defined ourselves, the “truth as it is in Yahshua” is not just a matter of doctrines or beliefs. The religion of Christ is a way of finding one’s true identity, the person you were intended to be when your soul was conceived by Yahweh. At conversion, therefore, you become (in character) the person you would have been in the Garden of Eden, a reflection of our Creator in whose image we were made. A true Creation Seventh Day Adventist is a person who has been restored to his or her real self, just as if sin had never entered into human history... and that is a powerful thing to know, and to believe.

Of course, your memories and experiences are intact, but this prior history of sin and ignorance does not mar the picture. Yahshua came into the world to set an example for us, and in so doing He subjected Himself to human limitations, and to a world that would not receive Him then any more than it receives Him today. And in following the path that He laid out for us, we allow Him to tell us who we are. We allow Him to define us according to His good pleasure, and the result of this is a holy, successful, victorious life.

Now tonight, I want to look at that idea from a slightly different perspective. In a recent Church meeting, we had an idea arise in our discussions that seemed like “new light” to some. And that is, that Satan – for all the darkness that is within his character – is not directly responsible for much of what he is blamed for doing. The key word is “directly.” Ultimately, he introduced sin to the universe, and in the judgment, the penalty he bears will reflect this. Thus, he is “indirectly” responsible for all that evil that occurs; however, this does not absolve from guilt those who directly accomplish those blameworthy acts.

If we, as individuals or a Church, do not properly prepare for events to come, and temptation limits the amount of success that we have in reaching the lost and dying, we could always fall back on excuses. We could say, “Satan was always attacking the Church.” We could say, “The enemy of souls has moved against us.” We could say, “Satan hardened the hearts of our hearers.” No doubt, these things are true – this is what the demons do, they seek to limit the work of Christ through His people. However, if we deliberately let these factors limit our effectiveness, then we receive what we have called in other studies “the atmosphere of victimization.” We would be using essentially the same excuse that nominal Christians make, on an individual level, when they decide to reject what the Bible says about victory over sin.

They say, “My flesh made me sin,” or “I lost my connection to Christ.” There is always, “Nobody is perfect,” and of course, “The devil made me do it.” You should be able to see the commonality between these and the earlier statements. These are things that are common to say, easy to say, but they do not reflect the reality of the effects of the uncorrupted Christian faith.

All of these excuses, both those that may be said as a Church, and those that may be said as an individual, are actually sinful themselves to believe and to claim. Why do I say that? If we define sin as the Bible does, as “a transgression of the law,” or more specifically, “a disregard for the law,” as a slightly more accurate translation of 1John 3:4 would read, then how does saying, “Satan was attacking us, therefore we failed,” come into play?

I will tell you that it violates the very first of the Ten Commandments. The first commandment reads, “I am Yahweh thy Elohim, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” (Exo 20:2, 3)

Generally, that phrase “before me” has been interpreted as “above me,” or “instead of me.” There is some connotation of that; however, what that verse actually says directly and literally is, “You will have no other gods in my face,” meaning in His presence. Satan is called “the god of this world,” but he is not to be held up in the “face” or the “presence” of Yahweh, to disrupt our relationship with Him. In other words, we are not to give attention to those things that present themselves as “gods,” as having power over and in our lives, because we are the Children of Yahweh, and He is our All-mighty One.

We have been taught to say, and I will return to this verse hereafter, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil 4:13)

Christ Himself has given us His promises to that effect. We might name many, but here are two that speak to me very clearly:

“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19)

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13)

And then, after giving us these promises and assurances, Yahshua tells us that this isn’t even the best part. He says, “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:20)

There are many reasons to rejoice in the faith of Yahshua. We rejoice in the truth. We rejoice in the power over temptation. We rejoice in the expectation of Heaven, and the purification of character that prepares us for that experience. But the thing that Yahshua directly tells us to rejoice in, is that our names are written in Heaven. We are known, by name, to the Father and His heavenly court. We are loved, as individuals, adopted into the divine family, and receive an everlasting inheritance that has nothing to do with material gain, and everything to do with serving and uniting with the Father and Son.

The reason why the CSDA Church is in harmony with the Biblical concept of the Family, and the Covenant, uniquely among churches of this generation, is because Yahshua has told us the things for which we are to rejoice. He speaks to and with His people; a claim that is made by many, but borne out in the fruit of so few. But let things be on earth as they are in Heaven.

To “pass the blame” to Satan when one falls short is to violate the commandment that tells us that no other “god” is permitted in the presence of Yahweh. And when He abides in us, no “god” can keep us

from perfectly fulfilling His will. The flesh is certainly no god. To claim that it can prevent us from overcoming sin is to disbelieve the Gospel at its most fundamental level. Our connection to Christ is not some thin wire or string, that it can be cut or broken by another god. He has promised that He shall never leave us nor forsake us, therefore if any connection is broken, it is because of an act of will on the human being's part, (I will talk about this in a moment) and this is not the born-again experience.

Similarly, on a collective scale, Satan cannot be a "god" who prevents the work of the Church from going forward, because Christ Yahshua has given us all that we need for success. He does not ask anything of us that is impossible. In fact, we know that His very Word to us IS the power to accomplish all that He asks. These are things we have seen already in our studies, but they really cannot be said too often. We cannot afford to forget the most basic principles of our faith. And knowing that Yah's Word is the power to obey, what is left is for us to show people how to apply it, to explain that when He says, "Thou shalt be perfect with Yahweh thy God." (Deu 18:13) and "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect," (Mat 5:48) these are not merely commands, but invitations, promises, and that He has given us all that we need, including the Covenant of His fellowship, with spiritual counselors, "That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2Tim 3:17)

This word "perfect," ought not to be a shameful word, as so many churches teach indirectly, as if it were the sin of pride to accept that which has been given to us as a gift at infinite cost.

So, if there can be no excuses to fall short, and if Christ Himself gives us all that we need to accomplish the will of the Father, where does this place the responsibility to act, to obey, to do?

The nominal and ecumenical churches appear at this point and say, "Salvation is of faith, not of works." The once-saved-always-saved folks will protest, "Once you accept Jesus, your actions have no bearing on your eternal destiny, or the everlasting state of your soul." Salvation is of faith, that much is true, but the Biblical word for "faith," and the popular conception of "faith" in this generation are two very different things.

The "Faith of Yahshua" is the set of beliefs that He had, those beliefs that caused Him to forsake all for the salvation of mankind. If the "Faith of Yahshua" is what we have, then we prove the truth of the verse, that "faith without works is dead." The responsibility, therefore, is on us, to show the true nature of the faith that we claim. The works that we, as Christians, do (for the Bible instructs us to do good works) have three effects with regard to our faith.

First, the works strengthen and refine that faith. "Seest thou how faith wrought with [Abraham's] works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (James 2:22)

Second, the works reveal that faith. "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt, for the tree is known by his fruit." (Mat 12:33)

Third, the works seal us to that faith, transforming our characters into the ideals of that faith's principles. "And to godliness [add] brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Yahshua the Messiah. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." (2 Pet 1:7, 8, 10)

This third one is subtly different from the first. The first one is about refining that faith itself, and deepening our understanding... making us more capable in the truth. One may have deep understanding of truth and righteousness, however, and yet miss the mark. The third one is about becoming Christ-like through the unbroken exercise of those things that we believe.

In THE faith, of course, the true faith of Yahshua, these things cannot be separated. As we live faith, that faith is strengthened, we bear a Christian witness, and we receive the Seal of Yahweh on our foreheads – all as a single process that we call “Sanctification.”

As I said, I would like to return to this verse that I have quoted: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil 4:13) This is the verse from which I have taken the name of this study. Who is “I?” Who is the “I” in that verse?

If we understand conversion to a degree, but not perfectly, we might quote this verse in response: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Gal 2:20)

There is nothing wrong with that verse; it is a beautiful description of the state of those who are “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 6:11) However, it is not addressing the exact same issue as Paul’s writings to the Philippians. If it were, then Paul would have no need to write advice, instructions, or even warnings and admonitions to his converts, because Christ in them, if He had fully taken over their “I,” would lead them unerringly into greater and greater glory.

While “self” is dead, this does not mean that our Father takes full control over our will. This is a very delicate matter to contemplate, but it is one of the less obvious reasons why CSDAs have generally had issue with the traditional Trinity doctrine. The “possession” by the Holy Spirit, by which the Father and Son come to dwell within us, is not the possession of a sentient spirit/spiritual like a demon, one that controls the will and causes one to act contrary to his or her desires.

To be Spirit-filled does not mean to become a puppet. As I began the study by saying, conversion makes us our true, individual selves. “I” truly become “I.” The choices are still ours, and it is the character, rather than the will, that is united with Christ. Now, we need to place a difference between a “character” and a “will.” You could think of it this way. The will is the power to make choices, and the character is the reason why we make the choices we make. To illustrate, suppose you had a servant that has been trained to act without thought at your command. You could command him to do things, and he would do them. On the other hand, you were not required to use that method; you could explain to your servant why such a thing would be a good idea, and then the servant would do it without the need for your irresistible command.

If the reason to perform the action is a good one, then the servant’s obedience is just as certain as if you had commanded him (if the servant is a good and faithful one) but there is a very different spiritual atmosphere that results from the second way to accomplish goals.

Similarly, Yahweh does not rule man’s will (by His own choice to leave us free) but He will work with us and in us through His Holy Spirit. Thus, Galatians 2:20 tells us that “self” is dead, meaning that our motivations, our reasons, our character, have been placed in a grave, and Christ’s motivations, reasons, and character are what is introduced. But, the will is still our own, and this is what makes us individuals

rather than merely copies of one man. This is what makes us responsible for our choices. Those choices are still our own to make, and we therefore have to decide – freely – if we will be good servants, who are convinced through reason and love to obey, or false servants who know the desire of the master, but through wickedness and neglect leave those things undone.

So then, who is “I,” when it is said, “I can do all things through Christ?” That “I” is a combination of Christ’s shared character and our individual will. We do not sit back and “become sanctified.” When we become the person we were meant to be in Eden, we sanctify ourselves by allowing ourselves to be led, our choices to be directed, by Christ’s character in us – by Christ in us, the hope of glory. As Adventist writings rightly tell us, we are given the tools to overcome, and we are to call upon divine assistance at all times, but it is left to us to remedy those defects of character that would prevent us from flourishing in the light of Heaven. “I” can do all things through Christ, therefore “I” will remedy those defects of character that Yahshua reveals to me by His Spirit, His Word and His People.

“I” can do all things through Christ, because I choose (with my will) to do what He leads me to do (by His character). While the spiritual “mechanics” of this are mysterious, the reality of it is beautiful in its simplicity. This is how we partake of His divine nature, and become beings of both Holy Spirit and human flesh. That is who “I” in that verse is, and that is therefore (may we all say) who I am.

Are there any questions or comments as we close?