

Creativity in Religion

Happy Sabbath to all.

Tonight I would like to speak about a subject that we've touched on a few times before, but from a slightly different perspective. The CSDA Church has a number of studies online explaining the importance of individuality in religion.

While we are all "one" with the Father and Son, and keep the same Law, and share a common understanding of Heavenly Principles (a Biblical instruction that is sometimes ignorantly confused with an attachment to man-made creeds), we are nevertheless valued by our Creator as unique individuals. As Protestants, we understand this freedom – a freedom of conscience – to be a fundamental part of Yah's plan for us, and a concept worth defending as fiercely as any other gift from our Father.

However, what I would like to do is have us expand our understanding a little. What I have said above, while entirely true, illuminates only a part of the issue, and it is a relatively "passive" component. By that I mean, we consider religious liberty as something worth defending, worth preserving, and we are to steadfastly resist any intrusions of civil and even religious authorities into the realm of individual convictions about worship.

There is also an active element that forms a part of the perfect Character. Consider, if Yahshua had merely "stood for right principles" in a reactive way, and refused to commit sin when tempted, there would have been no earthly ministry in any recordable form, and perhaps no eternal Sacrifice on our behalf. Yahshua understood what we now call the Protestant mindset as an active calling, as a responsibility that He felt toward those who did not yet know the Father as He did. The right principles that He followed, and would defend, actually led Him to embark upon a course of action that drove Him into direct conflict with those who had come under the Dragon's influence.

In all of Christendom, among the millions who claim to be followers of Christ, even within the ranks of Adventists, there are few who actually feel as Yahshua felt, and are driven to do as He did. There are few who are truly "individuals" when it comes to their religious understanding, and who will go beyond merely receivers of grace (as they believe they are) and on into those who are truly like the Son of Man.

What do I mean, in this context, of being "like" the Son of Man?

We read that, in the beginning, "Elohim said, 'Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'" (Gen 1:26)

This is the first appearance in the sacred writings of the words “image” and “likeness.” They are actually synonyms. They have essentially the same meaning, and therefore only one of them would have been sufficient to convey the idea that the Almighty was expressing. And yet, we see two words, with the same meaning, to describe the nature of man as an “image” and a “likeness” of the Infinite Creator.

The obvious reason here is that these words were included for emphasis. They were included to indicate just how strongly Yah wants us to be like Him. And we are not permitted the least excuse for neglecting or forgetting this earliest, this very first, statement about the human condition.

The very first time we read about mankind, it is in terms of his likeness to Yahweh Himself.

As we have explained in other studies, we are not “like” Yah in terms of an infinite degree of strength, or wisdom, or knowledge. The Scriptures tell us the ways in which we are to be like Him:

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Mat 5:48)

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)

Other verses that we have seen before, that actually address the same idea, include:

“But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1Cor 2:15, 16)

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Pet 4:1)

“And He gave some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13)

I am taking some time to fully support this idea, because I want the principles to be firmly before us. I have mentioned the ways in which we are not “like” our Father, but the ways in which we ARE like Him, as described in these verses, involves similarity of mind, judgment, thought, and moral uprightness. It involves the same love of righteousness, and hatred of sin, and divine character that may be achieved through the gifts of the Spirit and the support of our fellow covenant-members.

It also involves creativity. If we look at the first chapters of Genesis, we see that the very first thing Adam was recorded as doing was responding to this action of the Almighty: “And out of

the ground Yahweh Elohim formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what He would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field". (Gen 2:19, 20)

Whatsoever Adam called each creature, that was its name. This is the very first act that our first father is described as "doing," and it is an intensely, powerfully creative act. Yahweh, in His infinite wisdom, well knew what best to call each animal. In fact, there are "only" a few thousand kinds of creatures created on earth, but we are told, "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." (Psa 147:4)

Yahweh has a name for each one of the trillions and billions of stars, most of which we have never even been able to see and count, much less identify uniquely. But for our Father, this is nothing difficult.

And yet, for a few thousand animals, the universe's Creator allowed Adam to call them whatsoever he wished, and that was not just the name by which the animal was "called," but "that was the name thereof." That became the true, and perfect, and intended name for each animal that the Almighty fully endorsed.

Adam was, from his very first recorded act, being trained to be more and more "like" Yahweh, who can number and name each star. Adam was called forth to exercise his own judgment, his own intelligence, in the way in which he was to oversee the affairs of the earth. This is a far cry, very far, from the mindset of the average Church-going Christian.

The Spirit-filled believer, like Adam, is called to be "like" unto Yahweh, not only in the ways that pertain to sin and righteousness, but also in the ways that emphasize his or her individuality in creative acts.

Now the world, committed as it is to "individualism" would see this as a contradiction. They view fundamentalist Christianity, with its emphasis on righteousness by faith, obedience to the Law, and commitment to temperance, as enemies of truly creative expression. To the outward appearance, I suppose they would feel justified in concluding this, since you will not find a CSDA running around wearing outrageous clothing or with strange piercings – these are things that the world considers to be creative and expressive.

But true creativity is not contrary to the Law of Yah. It might be thought that there are infinite ways to rebel, but only one way to obey... yet if we look at the Law of Yah, truly look at it, we find that the commandments are not designed to restrict our freedom in any tangible way as a collective group of people. The only way to ensure that true freedom exists in a society of people is to ensure that the boundaries of individual freedoms are clearly set; that is, that no individual can abuse his freedom to infringe upon the freedom of another.

Aside from the instructions that describe the proper form of worship, this is all that the commandments really do. In terms of our own approach to fulfilling the Law, we have been given the opportunity, like Adam, to see what we shall “call” the things around us. In other words, we are free to express our faith in a multitude of different ways.

Now you might ask, “How does this work? Most religious just tell us ‘do this,’ and ‘don’t do that.’ How is it that we can exercise creativity in religion?” The reason why this idea is rarely expressed in the teachings of a Church... well, there are actually two reasons.

The first is that few Churches actually encourage their members to fulfill the instructions of Christ, to “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,” (Mat 28:19) where the use of the word for “teach” there means literally to “make disciples of all nations,” as some versions like the NKJV and NASB will render it.

Second, few Churches indeed actually understand the Law of Yahweh. Just recently I was reading one of those Open Face newsletters from David Clayton. While we would disagree with him on a number of doctrines, such as my rebuttal to his review on Feast-keeping to which he never replied, he accurately described the Babylonian state of “Historic Adventism.” The picture that he paints, which is sadly accurate, is one of precise opposition to the vision of Ellen White, of a third Gospel angel leading a single, united people toward the gates of glory. Instead, we have these little independent groups, blowing back and forth with every wind of doctrine, some focused on the feasts, some on the sacred names, and others on the non-Trinitarian nature of the Godhead.

They all have a little piece of the puzzle, but without Victory over sin to tie it all together (for this, righteousness by faith, is not just “some doctrine” like the others, but the entire point of Christianity altogether) it is just a re-enactment of the very Tower of Babel. The language is confused, and the little groups go off in their various directions to fall further and further away from the truth.

One of the main areas of division among some of these “historic” groups, as Mr. Clayton describes it, is their understanding of “sin.” For some of these groups, “sin is the transgression of the law” and nothing further. For others, sin is a more fundamental concept that involves a state of unrest, a state of being outside the will and desires of Yahweh. Of course, for the CSDA, who understands what righteousness IS (it is something we possess “by faith”) this distinction is an absurdity. It is true that “sin is the transgression of the law,” so the first group is correct. However, the Law is NOT only the “letter” of the Decalogue, it is also the spirit, the mind, and the intent. In that way, the second group is also correct, because the spirit of the Law IS the spirit of rest, and harmony with the mind of the Father.

What we have here is the typically Babylonian outcome of individuals speaking spiritual words from a carnal mind. Without the covenant of victory, and trained consciences, there can be no

unity, no likeness even to one-another, much less likeness to Yahweh, which leads to true individuality and creative expression.

For those led by the Spirit, like Christ, they will not be content to “passively” uphold the principles of righteousness. They will see the needs of others, and the opportunities to testify of the Gospel. They will be driven, as Christ was, to seek ways in which to present the Good News about our Father. They will be the “same” in that they will all be committed to the same things, in agreement on the foundations of faith; however, because they are individuals, they will be led to express the truths of our faith in unique ways.

This is the desire of the Father for His children. Just as He had Adam begin his life with a tremendous expression of creativity, so He desires to see His story told by His children in different ways, from different hearts and minds. Some will prepare studies, some will preach, some will create videos, some will sing, some will write books... and this is just the tip of the iceberg. Each of us, as members of Yah’s covenant, has not only a role to play, but a creative energy that makes us just like Yahweh.

Now here is a key issue, and it is not a small matter. John says that when Yahshua returns, we will be like Him. This means that for all who are redeemed, they will have found their true selves. They will have learned who they are in Yahshua, and they will have become creators in their own rights, expressing the image of Yahweh to the world in their own, unique way.

Each individual that is redeemed by grace will, by the very nature of the Spirit within us, be creative within the context of the Gospel. We will have a voice, and a ministry. We will have a way to reach out, in our own unique ways, to touch others. This is a wonderful truth, and a beautiful promise to the people of Yah; but it is also a testimony against those who have thought that merely accepting the doctrinal positions of the Church, and coming into agreement on a theological level, and following the “rules” is sufficient to qualify as “taking up my cross and walking.”

Even attending these studies weekly... what do you do with the information that you are learning? Do you see it as merely an exposition of the Word of Yahweh that sometimes shows an interesting connection, or do you see it as a calling to be creative? Everything you learn about the Word of Yah, everything that you come to understand, becomes a part of who you are, and adds to your ability to be creative. True religion, whatever else it is, is an opportunity to become more like Yahweh, who is commonly called The Creator. True religion is an opportunity to express our true selves, and to call the things of this world, and the things of our lives, as they are through our own understanding and faith, and that is what they will be.

This is the way in which the Scriptures are fulfilled in us, “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things,” (Mat 12:35a) and, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Mat 18:18) Putting those things together, we see that Yahweh is inviting us, just as He invited

Adam, to take the responsibility of un-fallen humanity unto ourselves, and thus perfect His divine character.

Let us, in faith, accept this invitation.

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