

How Good and How Pleasant

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

For the past two weeks, we have had a pair of studies entitled “The Body and Mind of Christ.” Within that time, we covered three main points, which I will summarize very briefly as follows:

a) We are “one Body” in Yahshua. We are called to unity, and those who do not answer that call are either insensitive to, or resistant against, the leadings of the Holy Spirit, the primary purpose of which is to gather the unified Bride from the various parts of the earth. We are One with Yahshua, just as He is One with the Father, and therefore we are invited to share their unique Glory.

b) We are “many members” of that One Body. Yahweh created each person with a unique personality and nature. This is one of the miracles of the creation, that each person was conceived in the mind of Yah from the beginning, and is brought forth to fulfill a specific purpose. That purpose can only find its proper expression within the context of the Bride, and within that Bride each soul is valuable in its particular identity.

c) We are “members, one of another.” While physical bodies have but one brain, one mind, each member of the Spiritual Body of Yahshua has both “the mind of Christ,” and his or her own personality to express that mind. This means that, unlike the earthly bodies, each member of the Body of Yahshua has responsibilities toward the rest of the Church. Each has the duty to exercise his or her creativity, talents, and powers to expand the kingdom, and to edify the Brethren. Those who do not do this are not bringing forth fruit from the “Seed,” the Son of Yah that abides in every born-again Christian.

Tonight, I want to go a little further into that last point because, since the recent Feast of Tabernacles, the Spirit has been speaking to Yah’s People about brotherhood. We know that the Remnant people, at the time of Yahshua’s return, will be living in the age of Laodicea, but they will not – themselves – be characterized by Revelation’s description of that Church. They will be like unto the Church of Philadelphia – brotherly love – and this was made clear even from the time of the Gospels, for the Master said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35)

It is very significant to me that Yahshua could have said a great many things when addressing the distinguishing characteristic of discipleship. In other words, there are a number of excellent answers He could have given, if Yahshua had been asked, “How will the world know your true followers from nominal Christians, deceivers, and apostates?”

He could have said, “They will love Yahweh with all their strength, and praise Him openly at every opportunity.” He could have said, “They will work miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead.” He could have said, “They will be delivered from every danger that approaches

them.” Now, these things are true, and are genuine signs that follow the believers, do not doubt that... but when it came down to the very “thing” that makes a believer a believer, Yahshua said basically this: “That they will have brotherly love.”

The people of Yah know what it means that they are “Brethren,” and therefore we would be careless in our own sanctification, as individuals and as a Church, if we did not spend some time to pray and meditate on this word.

The Bible says that we are “members one of another.” This was where we ended our study on the Body and Mind of Christ, but there is so much more yet to be gained from that verse, and that phrase. One of the things I really wanted to get across is just how powerful the bond is between brothers in Christ Yahshua. It is beyond emotion, beyond human loyalties, beyond family ties... but it is also a gift that has been put into our care for stewardship and safekeeping.

Adam was given a garden, and he was told “Guard this place.” Every instruction of Yahweh given to Adam will be fulfilled, spiritually, by the 144,000 who return to the pre-fall state of grace. Yahweh gives us a garden, and He says, “Guard it.” What is that garden He gives us?

We read: “For the vineyard of Yahweh of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant.” (Isa 5:7a) The rest of that verse indicates that Yah did not receive pleasant fruit from that “pleasant plant.” In fact, we are told that false teachers destroyed the integrity of this garden, (Jer 12:10) until even the Son of the garden’s Owner was slain because of jealousy, (Mat 21:38, 39) and so the Owner gave His garden to another. (Mat 21:41 - 43)

When we think of the vineyard as the “Church,” what do we mean? We know better than to conclude that it is a building. We know that the Church is a Brotherhood, a fellowship of saints. We know that it is this, and not buildings of stone, that constitute the Temple of the Holy Spirit. So then, if we are to fulfill Adam’s mission on the earth, we are set here on earth to “dress and keep,” to guard, the Brethren.

Adam failed to keep the garden safe for his wife. His son Cain failed to keep his brother safe from his own carnality. From that time to this, the Bible has been showing us the answer to Cain’s question, “Am I my brother’s herdsman?” (Gen 4:9) It is usually translated as “keeper,” but I think that word has lost its meaning and impact through common, even secular, use.

The word Cain used, “shamar,” means a watchman, a guard, a protector of a garden, or a flock of sheep. It is a perfect word to describe precisely what he was to do, and how he fell short of Yah’s instructions. And what is Yah’s answer to Cain? You will notice, He did not reply directly to the question in Genesis 4:10. Instead, He said, “What hast thou done?” and placed a curse upon him.

But Yah did answer Cain's question. He answered Cain's question so thoroughly, so completely, that the universe itself paused to listen. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) This was no mere doctrine for the Messiah, for He, as a Man, lay down His life for all, guarding us, protecting us, keeping us, from the enemy that we had invited into our garden through sin. He, Yahshua, is the true Shepherd, the true Shamar, the true keeper of the Brethren.

But, not content with that, just as He received glory from the Father and gave it to us, showing that we are not "other" but "One," so He receives the commission from the Father to guard and keep the Brethren, and He turns to us and says, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (John 15:12) This, and nothing less, is what it means to be Brethren.

But what are Brethren? How does the world use the term?

You know, the Pharisees had a problem with the word "neighbor." They asked, "Who is my neighbor? Who are those I am obligated to help?" There is no love in those questions. They wanted to know the minimum level of responsibility they could take for others, while cherishing their reputations and riches.

We know the parable of the Good Samaritan given in answer, and it means more than most people realize, for the Samaritans were despised by the Pharisees as being heretics and fools, misquoting and misrepresenting the writings of Moses to create a counterfeit religion. To be sure, they did deviate from the pure religion of Israel... but the Pharisees were no different, no better.

Yahshua taught that all men were neighbors, because our love for others cannot be limited by any artificial boundary. But what about Brethren? As I have said in a previous study or two, sometimes the language of Yahshua was inclusive, and sometimes it was exclusive. Sometimes He spoke broadly, teaching that He has come to give all men rest. Sometimes He said that He was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, and focused His time and teaching on the chosen nation because the day of their visitation had come.

Likewise, sometimes the language of the Church is inclusive, and sometimes it is exclusive.

The Church consists of members who are members "one of another." They are not members of the world. They are not members of other movements, denominations or ministries. They are covenanted together to raise one another up, and feel toward one another as Cain should have felt about Abel.

The name of this study is "How Good and How Pleasant," and it is taken from this very short Psalm that I will quote in its entirety: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the

beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments, as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there Yahweh commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." (Psa 133)

Without going into all the particulars, I will say that this is a powerful Psalm. It speaks of love, and commandment. It speaks of blessing and priesthood. It speaks of holiness and covenant. It speaks of the latter rain, which will only descend upon a people who know what it means to be Brethren, for without that dew of Hermon no man shall see God.

To be Brethren means more than the world has caused it to mean. The world throws it around as they do that "brother's keeper" verse. They use it to mean general agreement, some doctrinal commonality. For some Churches, if you believe the Trinity, if you accept Jesus as your personal Savior, maybe if you keep Sunday as Church-day, then you are "brethren." If you are a member of a mainstream evangelical denomination, you are "brethren."

Among Adventists... of course in this new Sister of Fallen Babylon the definition can only be chaotic. For some groups you have to keep the feasts. For some you have to be non-Trinitarian. For some you have to belong to this or that group. For some it doesn't really mean anything tangible at all beyond general good feelings of friendship... this cannot be what the Holy Scriptures meant.

But the definition Yahshua gave is the one that CSDAs use. If you love me, truly love me with agape-love, you are my brother. If you would give yourself for my salvation, you are my sister. And this does not mean merely to die that I might live... it also means to live so that I might live better. It means we are to be herdsmen to one another, shepherds, keepers. It means that – because of love – we hold one another to the standards of our faith, of our covenant, which are things that accompany salvation.

It means that, yes, we publicly declare our unity one with another if possible, because the Scriptures speak of repentance, faith, and then baptism as the signs of entrance into the kingdom, and that baptism is into the Body, not just into the Head, that is Christ. It is not a loose fellowship.

Our Creed, as we have often said, is John 17. It is about unity, and the love that leads to that unity. But many mistake that love with sentimentality and emotion. If we truly love one another, how can we not encourage, reprove, correct?

I may not be in Covenant with Roman Catholics, Anglicans, or Baptists, so in the technical meaning of the word, we are not "brethren." With mainstream Adventists, and those in other similar groups, I consider myself to be "former brethren." But if such a one claims to be my brother, and claims to have agape-love for me, then by faith I claim that person as a brother.

Now, do we then shake hands and go our own ways? No. No... the blessing that leads to eternal life, as the Psalm says, is to have these brethren “dwell” together. Now, this does not mean they must move in with me, or I with them. I dwell with my brethren as Yahshua dwells with me, by residing in me by His Spirit. With those who claim to be my brother, I will sit and eat, spiritually speaking. I will abide with him, feast with him, and help him heavenward. If he loves me truly, he will attempt to indicate where we differ, so he can show me the truth. If I love him truly, I will attempt to show him where our differences can be overcome.

If my Roman Catholic Brother is a Brother in fact, we will indeed become members of the same Body of Christ on the earth. Of course, we would say that this would involve accepting the commandments and surrendering much man-made tradition... but through Christ, and through agape, all things are possible.

Similarly, if we have agape, if we seek brotherhood, with our fellow Adventist believers, of any group, then we must let that agape speak, and this is the heart of our evangelism toward them. If they share our spirit, then this will also be the heart of their evangelism toward US, and the Spirit of Yah will reveal all truth.

If we are brethren, we have one Father, and the same Spirit. If that is the case, then we are (or must quickly become) members of the same Bride, the same Church. Now, again, this might sound “exclusivist,” but it is the teaching of the Word, that knew only one, united Bride, and the work of the Holy Spirit that was sent to gather that Bride. Some might say, “But I am ‘brethren’ with this group, or that group.” This is not Biblical, however, it is not true... if that brotherhood does not cause change in one or both toward unity. The Scriptures tell us this plainly. John 17 tells us this plainly.

The claim to brotherhood... this is not a casual thing. It has Biblical significance. We see, for example, this passage, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within?” (1Cor 5:9-12)

There are things for the brethren here to learn, and things for those who claim to be brethren to learn, and of course things for people in the world to learn, from the words of Yahweh to His servant. If one claims to be a brother, we have expectations of them. They are to have expectations of us, toward sanctification, and we are to have expectations of them.

If someone says, “I am your brother,” I must let them know, “Then, for agape, I am your keeper. I am your Shamar, your herdsman. I will love you. I will attempt to guide you. I will attempt to

learn from you and teach you. But if you hate this and draw back, if you prove to be a false brother, then the Spirit of Yah will reveal this, and you will no longer wish to call yourself my brother.”

If Adam had “kept” Eden, how different human history would have been! If Cain had been his brother’s guardian, and not his murderer, we cannot know how very different human history would have been... perhaps, there would never have been the need of a flood, and all the confusion that those traces of history have caused us even down to this very day. And today, if we become keepers of the Brethren, if we are Brethren indeed, how different will history be, even the little bit of it that is left until the close of human probation?

But it is not too late, Brethren, for us to learn more deeply of what this means, and thus to draw ourselves, and others, into Zion, because it is there, among the true Brothers, that “Yahweh commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” (Psa 133:2) Let us know this doctrine, this truth, and let it change us from the inside out, to know and love the Church, and to know and love all mankind.

Creation 7th day Adventism
flyinglecreature@hotmail.com