

The Conversion of Saul

Happy Sabbath to everyone,

Tonight, I would like to continue from where we left off last week in our discussion of unity and, as the title indicates, I will be referencing the conversion of Saul.

Last week we saw, with Scriptural support, that unity is a fundamental aspect of the character and spirit of Yahshua. As Creation Seventh Day Adventists, we have often said that there are three “pillars” of our faith, which correspond to the Three Angels’ Message: Victory, Purity, and Unity.

Just as one must necessarily have victory if born again, and have purity when converted, so being in unity with the Father, the Son, and Their People is an indicative component of the new Creature. In other words, one who is born again WILL have victory over sin, and have purity of life and doctrine. By the same token, one who is born again WILL be in unity of spirit, purpose, and commitment with the Father, the Son, and the Son’s Bride.

Of course, just as one will “have” victory but seek a deeper understanding of victory through sanctification, and just as one will “have” purity, but seek and be blessed by new light, so a sense of unity can be further developed and deepened through fellowship and participation in the Christian community. It is not that the unity is made “better,” any more than we can be “more pure,” or “more victorious,” but as our understanding of unity deepens, our manifestation of it will become more apparent, and our testimony to the world made more compelling.

So then, one who is born again is in unity with Yah’s principles whether they are in Heaven or on earth. The only time the Scriptures indicate “coming into” unity is in discussion of the need to be converted, and so Christians ought indeed to be concerned with coming into unity – but as a focus of evangelism to those who are not yet living in the resurrected life.

As I have gone through Letters to Rachel, I find that in the sixth letter I begin to get into specifics of what is necessary to endure to the end within the New Covenant, and I spoke of Pentecost, the calling of the deacons, the disputes with the Sanhedrin, and then the conversion of Saul to Paul.

As I said last week, Paul is a most interesting case, because while everyone who is converted becomes a completely new creature from what he or she was before, in few people is the change so completely a reversal (to outward appearances, at least) of the “old man.”

In addition, the conversion of Paul reveals in a fairly dramatic way the manner in which Yahshua is one with His people, and how the early Church's unity contributed to its initial successes.

When Saul was first introduced, he was firmly convinced that the course of the religious leaders was the correct one. They had years of tradition on their side, and records of the very oracles

and angels of Yahweh blessing their founding members. They had doctrines and practices that had led godly men to commit acts of spiritual heroism in the past, and an evangelical outreach that was leading to conversions in even the farthest corners of the earth.

They were blessed financially, and even though there were some offshoot groups (such as the Zealots and the Essenes), and even though there were some “reform” groups trying to change things from within, and even though there was a split between the “conservatives” and the “progressives” (as indicated by some specifics of the Sadducees and Pharisees), they were, after all “the People.”

It was clear to Saul that as “the People,” the leaders had the right, even the duty, to defend the integrity of the Jewish Nation from opponents, and if that meant occasionally calling upon the Roman authorities, or even a rare public stoning, well... those were just the unfortunate necessities of living in a sinful world.

To anyone who is aware of the facts, this should sound extremely familiar. Saul was, for all intents and purposes, a member of the first century Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Even though all historical evidence seemed to be with Judaism, however, they had committed a fatal error, and that was, in a state of backslidden self-sufficiency, they had given their “headship” over to the world, and let this union with secular power cement their rejection of Yahweh’s character as perfectly expressed through the Messiah, His Son.

Saul, in ignorance of what this denial meant, continued to do just as he had before – defend His Church with all the power at his disposal. At a certain point, however, Yahshua struck him from his horse with a beam of light, and that event began his transformation into the most visible evangelist of the Christian Church.

It might be thought that, that Paul was “converted” on the Road to Damascus, where Yahshua appeared to him in that brilliant light. However, like the apostles during Yahshua’s earthy ministry, things had really only begun for him there. As we know, conversion consists of three stages: repentance, faith, and then baptism. It is not until all three of these are accomplished that conversion can really be said to have taken place.

After Paul expressed a sincere desire to understand the meaning of what he had experienced on that day with Yahshua, as evidenced by him spending three days fasting and praying, (Acts 9:9) Yahshua did not appear to him and say, “Here is what I need you to know, and what I want you to do.”

Instead, Yahshua sent him to two disciples (Ananias and Peter) to learn about the Way that he had, up until that time, been ferociously persecuting.

I am not going to go through all the details of Paul’s early experience with the Apostolic Church, although I think that would make a worthy reading for us this week. However, I do want to point

out that it is very relevant to our discussion of unity that even the well-educated, well-spoken and charismatic individual who would become one of the greatest leaders in the early Church required education, and this involved him taking instruction from the Body.

No matter how blessed, how gifted, and how apparently “ok” someone is, it is Yah’s plan for such an individual that he or she works in connection with the visible Body on earth. This is one of the reasons why CSDAs place such importance on the concept of Church membership. It is not for any carnal purpose, or to make some showing for the world... but because it pleases our Father to see His people in covenant with Him, and one-another. This is the means by which (as He has told us) He sends us His blessings, those blessings so vital to everlasting life; and therefore it pleases us to promote it because we are “like” Him.

Now, there is an interesting (apparent) paradox revealed in Paul’s experiences. I find it very interesting that, that contrary to what much of His earthly ministry involved, it is Yahshua Who struck Paul blind, and it was one of His followers that healed his eyes.

In a sense, this demonstrates the change in the kind of ministry that Yahshua performs for our sakes. This incident, and several others, is subtle evidence that He has gone to stand before the Father and deal with final matters of judgment (as Adventists have been teaching all along)... while His disciples on the earth have been given the ministry of healing. As we read, “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13)

Of course, it is Yahshua who ultimately and truly does the healing; however, since His ascension, He has always operated through His agency on the earth. By that I mean healing is always an earthly ministry. I cannot recall a time when Biblical healing came down directly from Heaven by a light or through a vision. There was always someone praying, or an angel sent to earth; there was always a visible representative of Yahweh when healing took place.

The way that healing has been conducted since Yahshua’s ascension, which is a physical manifestation of the power of the Gospel, demonstrates clearly the unity that the Savior has with His people. The Spirit in Him that healed men during His walk on the earth is that same Spirit that operates now through the earthly Church, which reinforces what we were talking about last week and just now. Paul’s conversion, including the healing of his eyes (literally and spiritually) by the disciple Ananias, (Acts 9:12) shows the cooperation between the human agencies and the divine will. This is the pattern for all of Yah’s works on the earth – and unity is the key by which these works are accomplished.

Obviously, the individuals involved in Yah’s service must be born-again, must be converted and thus filled with the same Spirit of Yah. But for any cooperative work, for any coordinated work by a group, there must be visible unity among the believers as well, and this comes only – only – when all who are covenanted together acknowledge the Spirit with which they are filled, and recognize the unity that they already have by virtue of being one with the Savior.

For the Body of Christ, separated at times by distance, we must make the “step of faith” and simply claim that we have received what is true. This is the beginning of how unity becomes visible. It starts with a claim, and continues into an invincible testimony, precisely as with victory over sin.

Now, for most things, this would merely be presumption. A poor man claiming to be rich is still a poor man, and a foolish man claiming to be wise only makes his foolishness more apparent. In these cases, however, what these individuals are doing is denying the truth of what they are.

For the Christian, by faith we are “made” the thing that we were intended to be. There is a popular saying in Christianity, which is very contrary to the true Gospel, going something like: “I am not what I am supposed to be (yet), but I thank God I am not what I was.” I’ve heard a couple variations on this from popular ministers, and it only reveals to me how unqualified they are to speak on behalf of the Father. It doesn’t matter how many individuals listen to them week by week, or how influential their ministries may seem to be... those who accept these lines of secular, perverse reasoning are made further from Heaven than before, not closer.

“The just shall live by faith.” This is said in four verses, and so it is clearly a keystone of the Gospel. We find it, almost identically written, in Habakkuk 2:4 of the Old Testament, and then Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. Those who are justified are justified because they believe the promises that have been made to them by infinite power, and with infinite love. A poor man may claim to be rich although he is poor... but if One infinite in strength had first said to him, “I have made you rich,” then that man is rich, even if he does not yet recognize the truth of what he has received.

That is how it is with us. We have been given precious promises, but now it is our part. Now it is our place to agree, to acknowledge, to accept these things, and unity – like salvation, like the Holy Spirit – is something that we must claim as our own, and we then see the manifestation of this great glory in our lives.

The conversion of Paul shows us all these things: that Yah works through His people on earth, that only in cooperation may we accomplish the Father’s perfect will, that the Body of Christ IS that united channel of blessing through which the Gospel is to be provided, pure and powerful, to the world.

Let us then, brethren, be equal to the task. I do not say merely to pray that we are equal. I do not say hope that we become equal. The just shall live by faith. The just, at this moment, shall open our eyes and know, and see, that we are united... that we are indeed called, and chosen, and faithful, more than conquerors, and able to do the works of omnipotence before men, testifying that we have been with Yahshua, and that He leads us onward and upward to Heaven.

The members of the Body are tasked with bringing their fellow men into unity, which is the same as saying they are called to be evangelists, and messengers of the Truth. In this, we share what we have received, and that we will forever-after give thanks that we have received.

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