

Sight

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

This week's study will be relatively short, and in fact it has a relatively short title: "Sight."

There is a certain verse in the New Testament that reads, in part, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it." (Mat 16:4)

These words, or at least the first part up to "seeketh after a sign," is sometimes used to teach that looking for direct confirmation of Yah's will is somehow a weakness... that we must simply "walk by faith" when an idea is presented before us, or else we are being wicked and spiritually adulterous.

It is certainly true that we must walk by faith, but this is never a blind faith. We must "see" the will of Yah before us in order to commit to it with "reasonable service," (Rom 12:1) and in fact, the Scriptures tell us that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Yah." (Rom 10:17)

Although the sense "hearing" is specified in that verse, we might recall that this was written in a time during which there were no personal Bibles, and so the only way to interact with the Word of Yah was to hear it read in the synagogues or the budding Churches. The meaning of Paul's words is more general: faith comes by experiencing the truth as it is in Yahshua. This might be hearing the Scriptures read, reading it ourselves, or otherwise becoming familiar with it.

We know that the senses are Satan's avenue to tempt the soul, which is why we must guard our avenues; yet the senses are also how we may experience truth, purity, and righteousness. The Holy Spirit can, and does, speak directly to us through the voice of conscience and the light of insight, but It usually does so by working with the raw material of what we already know and believe.

The CSDA Church has been called by Yah to grow, both corporately and in terms of its individual members, into perfection, the fullness of the stature of Christ Yahshua. (Eph 4:13) While the counterfeit brides of Christ are still struggling with deliberate sin, most accepting transgression of the Law as expected and inevitable, we have been called to go beyond this, into the "meat" of the Gospel. (1Cor 3:2, Heb 5:12, Heb 6:1)

We are not to settle for what is merely good, but we seek that which is excellent, that which is perfect, and that fulfils the divine will of our Heavenly Father. We cannot do this by simply "ceasing to sin." That is only the first step: a seed from which a plant must grow that bears fruit. As Yahshua taught, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." (Mat 7:19)

One might think that He is speaking here of the world, of mankind in general; however, who is He addressing? Whom is He warning about "false prophets" and encouraging to ask the Father for "good things" in the passages leading up to that statement? He is speaking to His followers.

One who is not born again does not even have the "Seed of Yah" dwelling within; therefore, the trees here are those who claim to be followers of Christ. But if they merely rest in the soil, and get larger, this is not evidence that they are progressing toward sanctification. They must bring forth fruit, for this is the evidence of Yahshua dwelling within.

So then, we as a Church are called to wrestle with the “hard questions” of Christianity. We have ceased to sin; by faith, that is not the issue we are called to address. Now we must learn perfect righteousness, and this involves learning to be mature, to be wise, learning discernment, learning to use that eye salve that I mentioned last week, that we may “see.”

Sight is the key. We must see the way before us, or else we will be deceived. Yah must be a Lamp unto our path, or we will err. So what, then, of the verse I shared at the beginning? Didn't Yahshua say that asking for a sign of the Father's will was evidence of wickedness and impure faith?

First, we must look at the context. The chapter begins with the following verse, “The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would shew them a sign from heaven.” (Mat 16:1) The religious leaders were not, for the most part, in harmony with the Messiah's mission, although they claimed to be awaiting Yahweh's Anointed. The Pharisees and Sadducees were, themselves, divided; yet they found in Yahshua a common enemy, a common threat to their authority over the people.

So, Matthew explains that the audience here was hostile to Christ; and, in fact, he specifically says that they were “tempting” Him with their questions. Without having any intention of testing the spirits, merely expecting Him to fail, they said, “Give us a sign, and we will believe you.”

In verse four, Yahshua does say, “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign,” but look at what He says first. “He answered and said unto them, ‘When it is evening, ye say, “It will be fair weather: for the sky is red.” And in the morning, “It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and lowring.” O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?’” (Mat 16:3)

He asks, “Why are you asking me for a (yet another) sign? Haven't you already seen the many signs that have already been provided?” He might have pointed out that even the heathen, Magi from the eastern countries, knew the time of Yahshua's birth, and came to worship Him. He might have pointed out that even the Samaritans came to Him for healing and wisdom. Yet His own people, who had the benefit of the oracles, the patriarchs, and the words of Moses, neither knew the time of their visitation, nor the character of the One who had manifest His Spirit before them through the Law and the words of the prophets. They did not have spiritual sight.

John wrote, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” (John 1:11) Here is the evidence of it, described in passages such as the one from Matthew we have been examining.

Unto such a people as have no intention of receiving Him, Yahshua pronounces the judgment of wickedness and adultery. Their request for a sign was not sincere, they were merely tempting Him to speak hastily, or to fail to produce evidence of His divine mission before the people who were beginning to listen to Him.

In terms of the verse with which we began, it reads in full, “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And He left them, and departed.” (Mat 16:4)

This statement came at the end of the conversation, and then it concludes by saying that even the insincere would have a sign – that of His death and resurrection. Even the enemies of His ministry were

to have no excuse for failing to believe, because they would shortly thereafter hear the reports of His crucifixion and return, and bear witness to His followers moving about and speaking with divine power.

True faith is “sighted” faith. It is something that comes to us by beholding the goodness of our Father, and this can be revealed in many ways. It is not bad to ask for a sign to confirm our thoughts before acting, for it is through this that we can form convictions. Even when we step out in faith, we must know that the direction we are walking is that which is leading Heavenward, and there is no weakness in seeking this confirmation.

Now, there is a right and a wrong way to go about this. We read of the apostles seeking after signs in both the right way and the wrong way in the Scriptures. To select a replacement for Judas, a fallen one among the twelve, they cast lots. (Acts 1:26) They let “chance” decide between Matthias and Barsabas, when they probably weren’t even asking the right questions. Did there need to be exactly twelve at that time? Were they the ones called to decide who should replace Judas?

Shortly after this, Paul, formerly Saul, was “called to be an apostle.” (Rom 1:1, 1Cor 1:1, 1Cor 15:9) Now, there were thirteen, not twelve, and Paul was far more active than Matthias, who is never mentioned after Acts 1. In terms of lasting impact on the history of Christianity, Paul was clearly the one who was “sent” by Heaven, the definition of an apostle, and this was indeed done with great signs – a bright light from Heaven, miraculous healing, the power of the Holy Spirit attending his word and his travels.

There were, in this case as well, signs to confirm Yah’s will. Yet the Church then, as the Church now, needed to learn how to identify those signs set before it. When considering spiritual matters, it is easy to get caught up in the wonderful ideas and plans of our brethren, and such excitement is to be encouraged. Yet we must also count the cost before embarking upon warfare, (Luke 14:28-33) and this is a responsibility that lies, not at the door of those who seem to be pillars, but at our individual doors. There is corporate accountability, about which we must educate the world... but we must not neglect the principle of individual accountability either. Yah is seeking a people, each of whom would stand fast for Him if he or she were the only Christian left in the world.

It is up to the individual members of Christ’s Bride to know when they are being called, when they are being told to wait, when to speak, when to contemplate in silence, and how to confer with our brethren in faith, wisdom, and holy fear. We cannot afford to make mistakes in the way that we move forward, and our responsibility is to please the Father, not one another. Now, we would hope that the things that please the Father would also please the brethren who share His Spirit, but as we come into unity, we must know what that Spirit is saying to us.

Therefore, let each learn to speak freely his or her own mind when discussing plans for ministry. Let each be convinced in his or her own mind, as the apostle tells us. Let each have a vision of self, not as a follower of men, but as a follower of Yahshua. Let us consider many angles as we seek the confirmation of the Holy Spirit, fearing not to disagree in love and unity. This sounds like a contradiction, to disagree in unity, yet it is a necessary process for coming into one place from various points of origin. There is a way to do this without undermining respect, authority, or humility.

If we do not acknowledge, “I see things differently,” then we merely deny the truth, and it is not true “unity of faith” for some members to deny their better judgment in favor of a stronger opinion. We must

all agree on the principles of our faith, of course, for this is the foundation of our unity. Yet, we must each, individually, have “sight” of the Goal, whether that goal is the ultimate one of the perfection of Yahshua’s character, or the relatively minor goals set before us along the way.

As long as we are not lovers of sin, as long as we are not seeking signs in order to delay or avoid duty, then Heaven will reward our honest conversation. The right conversation is not about knowing the correct Biblical answers to questions, or common phrases often shared among Christians, but about being open about our concerns, our trials, our obstacles. We are seeking Pentecost. That is our immediate goal, I believe; and we shall fail to reach it if we do not spend time talking to one another, sharing with one another our true thoughts and feelings – being careful, always, to filter our thoughts and feelings for obvious temptations.

Let us, therefore, be seekers after signs, but in faith and in love. Let us be patient and “wait upon the Lord,” (Isa 40:31) growing spiritually mature, moving beyond the milk and into the meat of the Word of Yah. In this way, we will have confidence to speak, before one another, before the world, and ultimately, before the Father who will summon us all before Him in the Day that His Son returns to gather His people home.

Let us not be as the Pharisees and Sadducees, who could not recognize the signs they had already been given. Yahshua has counseled us to anoint our eyes, that we might have sight, so that we will know to buy of Him the gold of refined faith, and the raiment of His perfect, pure character. This we shall surely do, for we are prophesied to overcome, and be taken to our Home in glory.

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