

Why Philadelphia?

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

In tonight's study, I want to examine the answer to one, simple, question... and in fact a question made even simpler by our choice of focus.

I want to begin by establishing a certain fact, and that is this – that the original and correct position of Seventh-day Adventism is that the final spiritual state of the Church is that which is described in the Book of Revelation as the Church of Philadelphia. We will, of course, demonstrate this from the Bible, but it is of value to see that our pioneers were in harmony with Yah's Word on this point as on others.

According to James White, it was the Church of Philadelphia that began with the Advent message, saying "As the Philadelphia church applies to no other period than the time of the termination of the 2300 days (1844), when Christ closed His work for the world in the Holy, and opened the door of the Holiest of all, the conclusion seems irresistible that the open and shut door of Revelation 3:7, 8, refers to the change in the position and work of our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary." [James White, *NRH*, June 9, 1851]

Ellen White describes the last generation of the Redeemed this way: "The 144,000 were all sealed and perfectly united. On their foreheads was written, God, New Jerusalem, and a glorious star containing Jesus' new name. At our happy, holy state the wicked were enraged, and would rush violently up to lay hands on us to thrust us into prison, when we would stretch forth the hand in the name of the Lord, and they would fall helpless to the ground. Then it was that the synagogue of Satan knew that God had love us who could wash one another's feet and salute the brethren with a holy kiss, and they worshiped at our feet." [*Early Writings*, p. 15]

The significant portion is at the end, where she describes the actions of the wicked with regard to the saints, clearly drawn from this passage: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write [...] behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." (Rev 3:7, 9)

An article published by the Advent Review Publishing Committee in 1850 confirmed that this was, indeed, the proper understanding of the timeline of ages, stating, "Now just as sure as the Philadelphia church is the true church of the last days, just so sure the 144,000 are sealed, just before the coming of the Lord."

So, here is the question: Why? Why is it Philadelphia that is the "true church of the last days," the Church of which the 144,000 are members? I would like to look at this from a very practical perspective, ignoring for the moment the details of prophetic unfolding.

I will state it, right at the front; it is because the members of the last Church fulfill perfectly the nature and characteristics of that Church. If one of us were to be asked, "What do the 144,000 do?" We would probably reply, and quite correctly, that they perfectly follow in the footsteps of the Lamb. Yet, as I was discussing last week, with regard to the nature of words like "love," and "courtesy," and so on, we may be in danger of losing the specifics because we are too focused on the principles.

Now, this may seem a strange statement, since we often say, “Read for principle,” and “Prophecy is conditional, so focus on the underlying ideas.” That’s certainly the best way to approach spiritual teachings, but if we end there, saying, “I understand the principle,” this is not accounted to us for righteousness. This does not DO anything to sanctify the soul... we must live it out, and the only way to live out a principle is by manifesting its applicable specifics in our lives.

The reason we read for principle is because the specifics may change over time, or based on circumstances, or when applied to different people... but this does not mean there are no specific standards of behavior, no “correct” responses to the various choices lying before us.

The 144,000 follow in Yahshua’s example, because they love mankind as He did. They give themselves for mankind as He did; and this is not an abstract idea. They have love one for another, and this is a love that is visible, see-able. It is a love that drives us to connect to one another, to bear one another’s burdens, to share our triumphs, and also our sorrows, our doubts, our concerns.... in short, to communicate.

And if this seems like a light and simple thing, let me say this directly as well – those who do not have these characteristics, who do not experience this drawing-together in brotherly love, who are not committed to communication in the spirit of Philadelphia – they are not truly members of the Fold. They are not following Yahshua, and are not truly members of His Bride, and will not be able to withstand the temptations to break upon the Body before the end. In fact, there may be some already who are “not withstanding” the temptations even in this silent time of trouble.

I say it is a silent time of trouble because Satan is no less enraged against the Church of Yahshua, no less active toward our destruction, because the persecution is not visible. In fact, for some members, for some personalities and dispositions, THIS is the truly dangerous time, when we see little activity, and are tempted to grow weary in well-doing. If we have the support and love of our brethren, then only may we endure the heat of summer before the visible showers of the Latter Rain.

And again, none of these are abstract concepts, but practical. The Scriptures tell us not only to love one another, but HOW to love one another. We read some examples below.

Yahshua said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35)

Paul said, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” (Rom 12:10)

Peter said, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.” (1 Pet 3:8)

John said, “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.” (1John 4:12)

Jude explains that it is the love of Yah that leads us to both build up the Church, and also to reach out to the lost and dying. (Jude 1:20-23)

Every chapter of the Book of James is about the practical application of brotherly love. The first mentions the care of the fatherless and widows. The second is about clothing the naked and feeding the hungry. The third is about the fruit of righteousness being sown in peace, with no envy or strife among the brethren. The fourth includes statements about supporting one another, and refraining from speaking evil of our beloved fellow-saints. The fifth mentions bearing burdens, praying for the sick, and confessing faults to one another.

If there is any other writer of the New Testament that I have left out, be certain that his writings include admonitions to brotherly love as well.

With so great a cloud of witnesses, then, shall we be clear if we neglect so great an aspect of our salvation? Shall any say, “I was not taught how to love the brethren?”

There are few ideas so clearly expressed to us in the New Testament as the importance, not of love for Yahweh – or at least, not only that – but of love for our brothers and sisters in the faith. In fact, John makes the presence of one dependent on the other in a verse that I would suggest we must take much more seriously than we have so far: “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1John 4:20)

Now, here is the CSDA version of that, for we who are seeking to be perfect in faith: “If a Church members says, ‘I love Yahweh and Yahshua,’ and prefers anything whatsoever to the best good and wellbeing of his brother, he is a liar. He that does not give his utmost for his brother, whom he hath seen, including time, resources, loving words of encouragement, loving words of rebuke, how can he love Yahweh whom he hath not yet seen?” How can we claim to have love for either Yahweh or our brethren if we are not adept at communicating with them?

I had hoped, at the end of last week’s meeting, that there would have been a bit more discussion about the acronym STARS, which I believe Yah has inspired so that we can easily learn, remember, and teach the basics of sanctified communication. If our words have significance, timeliness, accuracy, relevance, and sanctifying power, then when we speak, or when we type... when we send an email or make a post online, we are being a blessing to others. We are showing them love. We are expressing not only agape, but Philadelphia.

We communicate, as human beings, for several reasons. We communicate when we need to learn something. We communicate when we want to create something, including friendships and other connections. We communicate to express Agape (as I mentioned briefly last week). We also communicate for fellowship, and this is where the Philadelphia spirit comes in.

In worldly churches there are little groups, cliques, of people who “like” each other. They have things in common, and so communication among them is natural. In our Church, small and diverse, and spread-out, as it is, we would all say we have agape for one another. We would all say we have “love” for one another... but again, we want to avoid dwelling in the principles. We want to know the principles, and understand them, but we want to dwell in the specifics. The abstract concepts must be learned, so that the “fruit” of those concepts can come forth.

Perhaps we would all give to one another if there were need, perhaps even sacrificially... but that is not enough. I think we must remove from ourselves the idea that brotherly love is a “lesser” love than agape, than divine love. It is true, sometimes we look at it that way, and it is not always wrong to do so when we are focusing on the infinite sacrifice our Father and His Son have made for us, for we cannot match that kind of love.

But in terms of what we can express, in terms of what is required of us... well, just read the Scriptures. We are told, time and again, that we must have Philadelphia, because without it there can be no Agape.

Agape can seem distant at times. Yah, who loves us more than any other can possibly love us, speaks to us indirectly, rarely. His best expression of love toward us was to send us His Son, and then... we read this of that ultimate expression of agape: “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, ‘I will declare Thy Name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee.’” (Heb 2:11, 12; quoting Psa 22:22)

The inspired writer takes the words of David and applies it as a quotation from the Spirit of Christ, One who calls us “brother,” showing that the expression of Agape through humanity is a brotherly love, making one equal to the other in importance, and in sanctifying power.

If we understand this, then let us see our love for one another as no lesser love than Yah has shown us. Let our Philadelphia be a “picture” that the world can see of Yah’s agape. Let our characters be the “express image” of the Lamb whom we follow whithersoever He goeth. There is more I could say about this, but I do not want us to be caught up too much in the theology of it, for then there is danger of making it abstract.

Let us apply the principles we have been looking at for the past few weeks, truly apply them in our visible words, in our actions, in our thoughts one to another. Let us be “invested” in one another to the degree that the Savior is invested in each of us. This is not too hard for us, and we have received much instruction to this end.

When you “see” it, it is basic. But it is perhaps so simple it is in danger of being overlooked. I might summarize the message in its entirety in this way: How did Yahshua love? How did Yahshua express the all-powerful love of the Father? He did so by becoming brother to us. We call one another brethren; therefore, let us be that indeed... not only spiritually, but also emotionally, and then we shall be the Church of the 144,000... that Church of Philadelphia.

Finally, I will say this: There are some among us who are struggling. We all know this. They are suffering with temptations, and with how to deal with the trials of life. But are we not our brothers’ keepers? Shall we not bear the burden with them? Parables, doctrines, teachings... we have sufficient of these to know what our love toward them must look like. As we are Christ’s, let us put them into use.

We must be Philadelphia, or we shall not see the glory of Yahweh. But let none who read these words, or who see the image that Yah’s heard is placing before us, be filtered out, that Yah should give His garden to those bringing forth the fruit (of the Spirit) thereof. Let us commit to being the people, those worthy of that garden that has been tilled, planted, and watered, with infinite cost, and with infinite love.