

Without Excuse

Recently, my wife and I were having a conversation about commitment. A friend of mine was supposed to meet up with me, but never showed up, and didn't call. Now, this individual is a professed Christian, and so she said something to the effect, "Shouldn't Christian principles guide him to at least call if he wasn't able to make the meeting?"

It is an excellent question, and I replied that while it *should*, the big difference between the professed and the genuine is really the concept of victory over sin. Now, that sounds like a "generic" answer, but I really want us, as Yah's people, to realize just how far-reaching the implications of the victory message are.

We think, "If we have victory, we won't do anything we know is wrong," and that's certainly the central meaning, but there are applications of this basic principle to even those areas of our lives that others might not consider to be "sin."

Ultimately, we can advise people to act according to all righteousness, but unless they believe in victory, unless they have committed to perfect, unbroken integrity in all their dealings, they will always be able to excuse any actions. Whether gross sin, or "small" inconsistencies in their lives, if people do not understand what conversion is, what being born-again is, then these things will seem acceptable, even expected from time to time, and this draws the process of sanctification to a complete stop.



To re-state that, and to put it in a very clear way, the process of sanctification, the process of being prepared for Heaven, does not and cannot progress as long as any consciousness of unrighteousness exists within the individual. Now, ultimate, lasting sanctification can actually only take place within the context of the born-again experience, but this does not mean that Yah cannot work with even His professed followers to a degree, softening the hearts of the sincere, as an invitation of mercy drawing them closer to the true Christian experience.

The problem is that "growth" outside of the Covenant of the Bride is inconsistent at best. Is the individual truly overcoming sin, or is Satan providing them with false victories to deepen their confidence in their deceptive traditions? Regardless of partial or periodic victories, know that the demons are far more powerful than the carnal human being, and if the enemies of souls truly put any effort into it, no unconverted person can overcome their attacks.

The Scriptures describe the elements of faith as various pieces of armor through the allegory in Ephesians 6:14-17, with truth as a belt, righteousness as a breastplate, the gospel of peace as shoes, faith itself as a shield, and salvation as a helmet. These are things that are only consistently claimed by the born-again, for the nominal and unconverted will say that while they always have "salvation," they do not always

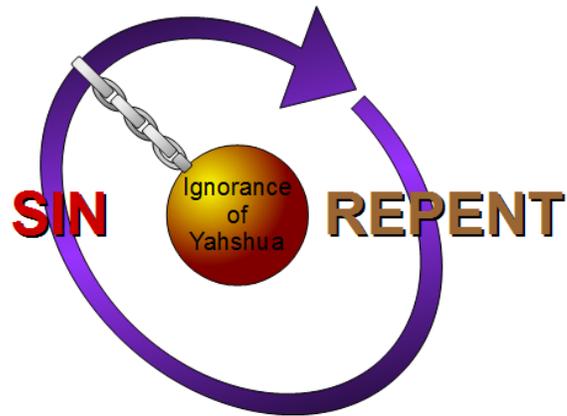
speak the truth, they do not always act according to righteousness, they are not always committed to the gospel of peace, and sometimes their faith falters.

That being the case, by their own admission they are not always protected against the intrusions of sin, yet we know that a single sin destroyed the connection between our Heavenly Father and our forefather Adam. A single sin is sufficient to earn an individual the wage of death. A single sin reveals that one is not in harmony with the Father and Son, and does not “know” them unto salvation. This is not a “light” thing, as it is commonly regarded today.

John is very clear in this matter, saying, “Whosoever abideth in [Yahshua] sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him.” (1 John 3:6)

This is a very difficult realization for the unconverted to come to. It was a difficult revelation for me, when I first learned of the victory message. John does not say, “Those who sin cease to know Christ.” He does not say they forget, or begin to ignore Him; it says that they have *never* seen Him before, and have not known Him *at all*, which is quite a powerful statement.

It indicates the truth of the victory Christ brings us, (1John 3:9; 1 John 5:4, 18) this verse all on its own, because it reveals that the truly converted do NOT live in a sin-repent cycle. They do not commit “occasional” sins, because John reveals that the knowledge of the Son of Yah prevents ALL sin, and always at all times. If the presence of sin indicates a lack of knowledge that ever existed, then once one says of Christ, “I know Him,” this is a commitment to everlasting righteousness, all the time. Any presence of sin after this indicates that the previous testimony was a lie, for “whosoever sinneth hath not [...] known Him.”



Ignorance of Christ chains one to a cycle of sin and repentance

I would like us to consider a rather unusual example of this, of someone claiming to have known, or not known, Yahshua, because there is something going on at the physical level, and something going on at the spiritual one. Consider this passage:

“Now [during Yahshua’s trial] Peter sat without in the palace, and a damsel came unto him, saying, ‘Thou also wast with Yahshua of Galilee.’ But he denied before them all, saying, ‘I know not what thou sayest.’

And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, ‘This fellow was also with Yahshua of Nazareth.’ And again he denied with an oath, ‘I do not know the Man.’

And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, ‘Surely thou also art one of them, for thy speech bewrayeth thee.’ Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, ‘I know not the Man.’ And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Yahshua, which said unto him, ‘Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice.’ And he went out, and wept bitterly.” (Mat 26:69-75)

Now, Peter was afraid for his life. It was obvious that the enemies of the Savior would stop at nothing to stop His undermining of their authority, His teaching the people of a direct connection to the Father without the need for their complicated and burdensome traditions, His miraculous evidence of divine favor. The disciple was not ignorant to the likely conclusion of the trial, and although He loved Yahshua, and could not bear to leave Him alone, at the same time He did not wish to share His fate, and represented himself as a curious bystander rather than a follower.

Spiritually speaking, nominal, professed Christians are doing exactly the same thing. They are *curious bystanders* of salvation. They know that the wages of sin is death. They know that to “cease” from sin means to give up their entire lives, not only those individual actions that they know to be “wrong,” but an entire restructuring of their approach to their interaction with the world. We read that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Cor 5:17)

This is good news, because only the new creature can survive the judgment, and will live forever... but the old creature loves the “old things” that would pass away, and will fight to protect its existence. The carnality of man, his beastly nature, acts on instinct when faced with the light of truth. And we all know how this works. When a bright light is turned on, creatures associated with the night (mice, roaches, raccoons, bats, etc.) will attempt to flee. They are startled by the brightness, and seek the comfort of more familiar surroundings.



With divine assistance, the human will can hold the carnal nature in the light of truth

The carnal nature is like that, but the will, the image of Yah in mankind, can choose to reign that creature in, can stand it still and let the light do its work, to burn away the “old things” and what is left behind is a different kind of creature, a transformed creature, that seeks the light rather than turning away.

But to use this will, to *want* to use this will, the individual must know about the Father, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to Yahweh must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” (Heb 11:6)

This is where evangelists come in. This is where pastors and teachers become necessary for the conversion of souls. It is not the human messenger that converts the soul, but we tell the soul about Yah, about His nature, and we say, “He is loving. He is trustworthy. If you place yourself in His hands, He will bear you up and give you life without limit.”

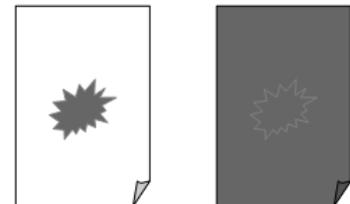
If the soul, hearing these words, decides to trust, decides to believe, then it makes it possible for that soul to say, unlike Peter, “I know the Man.” We can say, “I am His,” and even with the consequences before us, even with death the result of our choice, we say it gladly. We share His fate, we are led to the cross as He was led. But then, just as the cross was not the end for Yahshua, so it is not the end for us either; for once we give up the old things, once the old creature is dead, then the new creature lives, and the new creature rejoices.

Sadly, the commitment to perfect, unbroken righteousness, the decision to die to the old self, the decision to become the new creature through the promise of the Father and Son, the lack of these is not limited to the world. Professed Christians, in fact, may feel they have even “more” of an excuse to violate principle, because, “We have a Savior,” they say, “that will forgive us and restore us, unlike the rest of the world.”

But they do not think what this means... does the world have more of a reason to act righteously, because they have no Savior? Even the Christians making these excuses must acknowledge that this is an absurdity, and yet, their actions reveal that this is often an unspoken, if not unconscious, element of their faith. They will feel superior to the “heathen,” because the un-churched have no Rescuer from damnation, but they themselves feel perfectly free to commit acts worthy of damnation on occasion, and even tell other Christians, “Do not judge me because of this,” because they misunderstand the Rescue, they misunderstand the Salvation. They “hath not seen Him, neither known Him.”

It may be the case that some within the very Body of Christ have some smell of smoke of these things yet clinging to their garments. The work of sanctification is to find all those areas of our garments that smell like smoke, and wash them in the blood of the Lamb. Yahshua has given us “white” garments, and the reason for this is not only because white best represents purity, but also because white will most clearly show any spot or stain.

If dust or dirt falls upon a dark garment, it can very often pass unnoticed. But for those who are Yahshua’s followers, our sensitivity to sin as new creatures is “awake” compared to that of the world. Failing to keep commitments, failing to reliably accomplish the tasks to which people set themselves, these fall upon and cover the world like dust, and while they may go unnoticed as “normal” for the world and unconverted Christians, for us they would show up as stains, as visible marks of impurity.



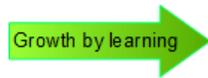
Stains show up much more clearly on light surfaces than dark ones

If any of us should find ourselves in such a state... well, here is where unconverted Christianity goes to extremes. They will either consider it of little importance, because we “just pray, and God forgives,” and we go on until we make the same errors over and over again... OR some (far fewer) groups and individuals go to the other extreme and fall into condemnation.

We who know the Father and Son know the truth of this matter. The stain on our garment is not acceptable, but neither do we accept condemnation if we find ourselves guilty of transgression in such matters. The Victory message teaches us that we do not “commit” sin, but we may “discover” sin when we were not previously aware of, or sensitive to, the nature of some action or habit as sinful. If we admit this, acknowledge that we have sinned when this discovery is made, then “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (cf. 1 John 5:9 vs. 1John 1:8-10) Let that last portion never be overlooked.

One thing we do not do is make excuses. There is no excuse for sin, and even we who confess it and put it away forever do not excuse it when we do so. We accept guilt, in the sense of “godly sorrow.” (2Cor 7:10) We accept error, admitting ignorance and misunderstandings as they arise, but then claiming forgiveness as it was intended, not merely to restore us, but to improve us through the cleansing described above. (cf. Psa 51:7, Psa 103:12, Isa 1:16 & 17)

For typical Christians, forgiveness is about restoration... it is about putting them “back” to where they were spiritually before they committed some sin. For the truly converted, we do not go backward, and neither do we remain in the same place. We read that we go from “glory to glory” by our beholding of the Savior, (2Cor 3:18) and as such, when we are forgiven from something we realize was displeasing to our Father, we are advanced along the path of righteousness; again, as John writes, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”



True growth vs stagnation

This is the work of sanctification. We grow both by acts of positive faith, and by acts of restorative faith. We learn by reading, study, interacting with the brethren, and hearing the voice of the Spirit teaching us of righteousness. We also learn if we err, for when we are restored we are not put back in the same place (as most believe), for then we would be in danger of simply reoffending in the same manner. But rather, we are cleansed of that unrighteousness that we have confessed, and are in NO danger of death from the same transgression ever again.

We read, “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” (Rom 1:20)

Because of the “invisible things” humanity has no excuse for sin. But what are those invisible things? They are the things that affect us, that lead us, that drive us, but not for specific reward or punishment. When our parents punished us as children, it was usually with some physical penalty. But as mature Christians, we are led about by the invisible things of Yahweh.

We are driven by love (both Agape and Philadelphia), by the Golden Rule for behavior, by the unexplainable work of the Spirit in our lives... and these things have large implications for our words and our actions. What may seem like “small” things to the world become more and more important to us as we draw near to the perfection of Yahshua’s character. The things that, in our worldly lives, we may have taken for granted become for us large gaps in behavior that we can never cross.

We who are seeking perfection see the character of Yahshua before us, and we are wearing white garments. The slightest stain shows up clearly on our spiritual clothing, and we rejoice that it is so... for when we stand before the Father in that Day, He will look upon us, and He will see in us a perfect reflection of His Son – NOT because the Son stands in front of us, shielding us from His Wrath, and NOT because the Son declares us clean even if we are not – but because we are truly like Christ. Because His Spirit dwells within us, and because He has made us like Himself in every least characteristic that affects our spiritual reality.

This, this very thing, is what we must share with the world, letting them know who the Father is. This must be our message, making it possible for the Spirit to soften their hearts, so that they, too, may choose to use their will to say, “I know the Man,” and to say that, to make that statement, understanding what it means. They will be tried with Yahshua. They will die with Yahshua... so the old things will indeed pass away. But then (glory to Yah!) they will rise with Yahshua, and so be alive forever more.