

“We Shall Be Like Him”

Our New Testament reading for the day transports our minds from the present day of evil, to the state of blessedness and glory that will pertain to the Age to Come:

“... we know that, when he shall appear, *we shall be like him* for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jno 3:2).

This is the hope of Believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ: not an abstract existence of nonentity in heavenly realms beyond the skies, but rather an identification with the One who shall appear to our Glory. The Psalmist spoke similarly: “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, *with thy likeness*” (Psa. 17:15).

Beholding and bearing the Divine likeness as manifested by our Master, is a vital aspect of Immortal Life in the Age of Christ’s rule over the earth. It is common for people to refer to Immortality as being an endless living existence - but Scripturally it is that and more. As well as existing for ever, the state of Immortality will be to bear the undying impress of a glorious array of Divine attributes, styled in Scripture, “the virtues of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

For men to become immortal therefore, is to become “like him” - or as it is expressed elsewhere, it is to “bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:48). Immortality is more than a ceaseless duration of life – it is also a *quality* of life, the possessors thereof reflecting the Image of the Father.

However, it is another fundamental principle of Scripture, that if we wish to “bear the image of the heavenly” in a nature of Immortality, we must strive to follow the ways of Christ during our days of mortality. Though we will not perfectly mirror Christ in every aspect, there has to be a desire to be conformed to his image (Rom. 8:29), a love for the principles of righteousness that he showed forth, and a longing to be delivered from what the Apostle describes of “the body of this death.”

This principle is implied in the events following the sin of our first parents. The existence of an Immortal race of sinful men was prevented with the expulsion of the first sinful pair from the Edenic Paradise: “Yahweh Elohim said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, *lest he put forth this hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:* Therefore Yahweh Elohim sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Gen. 3:22-23).

That sinners will be denied entry into immortality is a most basic first principle, regardless of what Universal Salvationists would have us believe. Sinners must become saints in order to be saved, for the fact that the first sinful members of our race were excluded from Paradise demonstrates that conversely those who will eventually be able to partake of the Antitypical Tree of Life (Rev. 2:7) are those who do not commit themselves to a life of sin, but rather pattern their lives upon the Righteousness of the Father. Though we look forward to the day when we shall

inherit “the image of the heavenly” physically, our responsibility for today is to show forth heavenly principles in our lives, morally.

This is the teaching of 1 John 3, for immediately after speaking of the Hope we have, in having our bodies immortalised, and fashioned like unto the glorious body of Messiah (Phil. 3:21), the apostle continues: “and every man that hath this hope in him purifyeth himself, *even as he is pure*” (1 Jno. 3:3). That is to say, just as Messiah is pure, so the believer should become like him – he should purify himself. The same principles were spoken to the believers at Corinth: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, *let us cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). Here is the logical outworking of the Truth in the principles that govern our daily lives. The Word itself is a powerful cleansing influence, able to “cleanse” our “way” (Psa. 119:9), and it is by taking heed to what it teaches that our outlook in life can be radically altered, to being centred around the Kingdom of God, and His Righteousness (Mat. 6:33).

Our Master, in his faithful endurance of the shame of the Cross has laid down an example for his disciples to follow:

“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21)

The exhortation then, is to “follow his steps.” The “steps” of Messiah led to the shame of crucifixion – but then to an elevation to glorious immortality at the Right Hand of the Father. If we seek to “follow his steps,” we will walk where he walked, and according to the principles that his walk in life displayed. As the Master himself taught: “if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat. 16:24). Though we may not literally be called upon to be sacrificed through crucifixion as was our Master, we are certainly called upon to “crucify the flesh” (Gal. 5:24), and yield ourselves as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). This, according to the inspired apostle, is our “reasonable service.”

We must become identified with Messiah’s sacrifice by laying down our lives in service to Yahweh, and thus show forth the principles that work together for His Glorification, and our salvation. In death, Christ destroyed that which had the power of death – the *diabolos* (Heb. 2:14), and declared the Righteousness of the Father in His condemnation of sinful flesh to the oblivion of death. These are principles which we must seek to be identified with. Through descending into the aqueous “grave” of Baptism, believers obey the Gospel, declare that Yahweh is right to require death as a consequence of sin - and in symbol, show forth the “likeness of [Christ’s] death” (Rom. 6:5). But in rising up out of the waters, they are no longer under bondage to Sin, for “our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6). Being purchased with the blood of the Lamb of God, believers become disciples, following the Lamb wherever he may lead them (Rev. 14:4) whether or not it be unto death, but certainly into the “inheritance of the Saints in Light” (Col. 1:12). Those who are buried with him in baptism (Col. 2:12) shall also be “in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6:5). So it is that a close identification with the atoning principles of Messiah’s life, death and resurrection is necessary in order for the believer to become “like him” physically as well as morally.

Becoming “the sons of God,” our relationship with death changes. Though we may still die, if we trust in the redeeming power of Christ’s blood, our death will be but a sleep, awaiting the rising of the Sun of Righteousness to awaken us at the commencement of a new day. So it is, that Christ taught:

“He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life” (Jno. 5:24)

Notice that here “everlasting life” is spoken of as a present possession. The principle being that expressed elsewhere, that “God, who quickeneth the dead calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). Such is the certainty of “those things” taking place, when seen in the overall purpose of the Deity, it is as though those things had occurred in actual fact. The literal truth of the matter is that though believers will sleep in the dust of the grave, the certainty of their awakening at the hand of their Messiah is so definite that in absolute terms, their relationship is to life, and not to death. They “shall not come into condemnation,” or as Paul expresses it elsewhere:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2).

There being “no condemnation” for those who walk in the steps of Messiah, after the Spirit, there is accordingly no need to be afraid of death, or of Yahweh who has ordained death to be the punishment for sin. Those who love the ways of the Spirit are guaranteed a place in the coming Kingdom, as it is written, “the desire of the righteous shall be granted” (Prov. 10:24). Their future is secured though faith in Christ, and for those who love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8) there is laid up a crown of glory. Love, and not fear, becomes the motivating force behind the believer’s conduct in life.

The Law of Moses operated under the principle of fear: fear of the One who “is a consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24) – fear of the consequences of sin, which the Law was not able to remove. But not so with those who are lovers of the Truth, for it is written:

“as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For *ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear*, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:14-15).

And again:

“there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 Jno. 4:18).

This theme is also picked up in the Spirit's Epistle to the Hebrews:

“ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words ... and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of Angels” (Heb. 12:18-22)

Here is the terror of the Law, which frightened even Moses. The sights and sounds of that day were to impress principles upon the minds of the people, and an acknowledgement of the Greatness of their God. But we, however, who live under the principles of the New Covenant, have not beheld these things, and have no need to fear. Love, not fear becomes the motivating principles of our lives, and so fear is cast out.

But notwithstanding this truth, the apostle continues to express the fact that there is a reverence by which the Father must be approached. Though we are not afraid of Him in the sense of the “exceeding fear” and quaking of Moses and the people, there is no excuse for us to become over familiar with the Father in our prayers and worship. He is the Almighty, as well as our Father, and should be approached humbly in acknowledgement of that fact. So the Apostle continues: “wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably *with reverence and godly fear*” (Heb. 12:28).

There is no contradiction in these things, rather an acknowledgement that those who love the Almighty must reverence him also. Like as a child loves his Father, yet being wary of the severity of his punishments for disobedience, even so we love Yahweh, whilst at the same time being mindful of the consequences should we turn away from His Ways. So it is written:

“My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:5-6).

As the children of the Father of Light, we trust implicitly in His Wisdom, and love Him because of the great things He has done for us:

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (Jno. 4:10-11)

This is a fundamental principle which we ought never forget: the Father called us *when we were dead in our trespasses and sins*. “God commendeth his love towards us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). In due time, Christ “died for *the ungodly*” (Rom. 5:6). It was not the case that we loved Yahweh, and that because of that love, he gave his Son to die on our behalf. Rather, it was that Yahweh extended His Love towards us when we were “the ungodly,” and “sinners”. Let us never become puffed up in a sense of inflated righteousness: the entire process is a work of Yahweh, as it is written: “ye are his workmanship” (Eph. 2:10). He took

us when we were yet in our sins, and converted us by His Word (Psa. 19:7), that our eyes being so enlightened, we might walk in the Light of His Word, and hope in His Promises for a coming day of Redemption. The entire process is of the Father, who loved us according to the principles of His Grace, and not our righteousness.

As we come to consider the emblems of Messiah's laying down his life for his friends, we behold the means of forgiveness and reconciliation to the Creator extended to us. Human nature is inherently sinful, and in Christ's offering up of himself, we see that nature rightly being brought into the grave. It declared the righteousness of Yahweh in requiring the death of sinful flesh, yet also in raising from the dead One who did not work of sin. As we behold the example of Christ's obedience to His Father, we see a mind, or disposition of thought being revealed – a mind which is formed in all those who seek after divine things:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought not equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-)

Here is the Mind of self-sacrifice. Here is the Mind of the Spirit - one which is perfectly in harmony with the ways of Yahweh. Not aspiring to the great things of this life, the mind and life (which is but the outworking of the mind) of the believer must reflect the humility and obedience of Messiah, who sought not his own glory, but that of his Father. Let that Mind be found in us therefore, that when He comes to be united with those who have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice (Psa. 50:5), He may recognize something in us worthy of perpetuation into immortality and that we might rejoice with him throughout the ages to come.

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