

Torah Observant “SHOMER MITZVOT”

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
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Towards Understanding the “New Covenant” and Yeshua’s Term “New Commandment”

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Prologue Part One: Ruach “Within” vs. Ruach “Upon”

**The prologue is an excerpt from my commentary The Ministry of the Ruach HaKodesh*

The very first mention of the Ruach in the Torah is in Genesis 1:2:

וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
 "...v'Ruach-Elohim m'rachefet al-paney ha-mayim"
 (...and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water)

Along with this reference, the Ruach is also mentioned in quite a few other surprising locations in the entire TaNaKH (Old Testament). Some rather familiar references are found in the story of Shimshon (Samson), where we learn that he enjoyed a special anointing from the Ruach (read Judges 13:24-14:20). In these verses the Ruach is described as "coming upon him powerfully." But was the Ruach within him? I've heard it taught that the Ruach did not enter into men until the New Covenant. However, concerning the construction of the Mishkan, B'tzal'el, the master craftsman, is said to have been "filled with the spirit of God..."¹ according to the 1917 JPS translation of the TaNaKH.

The confusion stirred up within the debate of "IN" vs. "ON," that is, a teaching which purports that "in the Old Testament the Spirit merely resided upon (on) folks, while in the New Testament the Spirit resides within (in) a person" firstly seems to ignore the fact that Scripture teaches us plainly that regeneration of a man cannot take place without the Ruach HaKodesh! Observe the language of this pasuk from Sha'ul:

1 But, brothers, I do not want you to go on being ignorant about the things of the Spirit. 2 You know that when you were pagans, no matter how you felt you were being led, you were being led astray to idols, which can't speak at all. 3 Therefore, I want to make it clear to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, "Yeshua is cursed!" and no one can say, "Yeshua is Lord," except by the Ruach HaKodesh. (1 Cor. 12:1-3)

Verse one seems as relevant today as it was back then! We believers seem to be ignorant concerning the work of the Spirit and as a result go about bickering and arguing about topics such as "IN" vs. "ON." Sha'ul's wish is that with the help of the unified Word of HaShem and the witness of the genuine indwelling Spirit we should all come to the unifying knowledge that God has graciously granted unto us, as demonstrated by sending us gifted individuals capable of disseminating genuine Truth to the Body:

12 Their task is to equip God's people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah, 13 until we all arrive at the unity implied by trusting and knowing the Son of God, at full manhood, at the standard of

¹ The Hebrew of Exodus 35:31 reads, "...וַיִּמְלֵא אֶת־רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים..."

maturity set by the Messiah's perfection. 14 We will then no longer be infants tossed about by the waves and blown along by every wind of teaching, at the mercy of people clever in devising ways to deceive. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in every respect grow up into him who is the head, the Messiah. 16 Under his control, the whole body is being fitted and held together by the support of every joint, with each part working to fulfill its function; this is how the body grows and builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:12-16)

What is it about the Spirit that will unite us as believers? Simply and foundationally that: only the Spirit can regenerate a man so as to cause him to declare Jesus as LORD! Verse two of our Corinthians passage above contrasts our former blindness and ignorance as “pagans being led by other than holy spirits” with now being led by the one and only Holy Spirit. The Greek word *ethnos* ἔθνη, often rendered as “Gentiles,” “pagans” must be understood within each individual context presented. Here it connotes a foreigner from the nations devoid of true knowledge and worship of HaShem, i.e., a pagan. Compare this now with the reality that we have in Messiah, viz, brought to life along with him through the gift of the Spirit. In this sense, we are no longer “pagans.” Did we come to this revelation on our own? No. Regeneration is accomplished solely by the divine fiat of God. Man is incapable of calling God “Abba” without becoming “born again” first (cf. all of Romans chapter eight, but specifically verses 14-17). The second clause of verse three of our Corinthian passage confirms this reality. That the second clause is perhaps a lesson in ontology² is also a possibility, one that I will not explore in this particular study.

Prologue Part Two: Ruach “Within” vs. Ruach “Upon”

What have we learned thus far? Simply that a person must experience the genuine regeneration from the Spirit in order to be genuinely saved. This truth is fundamentally applicable from Adam to today! No man approaches the Father except through Yeshua, and no man may come unless the Father draws him (see John 6:30-71 where the primary discussion is eternal life offered exclusively through Yeshua)!

Now let us turn to a discussion on Yeshua’s promise of the Spirit in Acts chapter one:

6 When they were together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore self-rule to Isra'el?" 7 He answered, "You don't need to know the dates or the times; the Father has kept these under his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Ruach HaKodesh comes upon you; you will be my witnesses both in Yerushalayim and in all Y'hudah and Shomron, indeed to the ends of the earth!" (Acts 1:6-8)

² The Oxford American Dictionary defines *ontology* as, “the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.”

Amazingly, we find a “New Testament” passage utilizing the word “upon” instead of “in.” The Greek word for “upon” above is ἐπί and it’s primary meaning is in fact “upon.”³ In fact, this word is never translated as “in” anywhere that I can find in the Apostolic Scriptures! Clearly the work of the Spirit in these verses refers to taking the Gospel message beyond the confines of the city limits, into the foreign mission field of the non-Jews, something “unthinkable” for the ethnocentric Jewish 1st century Judaisms. The Jewish core of the talmidim needed the empowering of the Ruach HaKodesh if they were going to overcome the social barriers created by the prevailing rabbinic halakhah that sought to separate Jew from non-Jew. Acts chapter two, which cites Joel 3:1-5 (2:28-32), is proof positive that God was using Jewish believers to reach out to non-Jewish peoples everywhere.

Another passage in the Apostolic Scriptures that uses the language of “on” where we would think it should read “in” is 1 Peter 4:12-16:

12 Dear friends, don't regard as strange the fiery ordeal occurring among you to test you, as if something extraordinary were happening to you. 13 Rather, to the extent that you share the fellowship of the Messiah's sufferings, rejoice; so that you will rejoice even more when his Sh'khinah is revealed. 14 If you are being insulted because you bear the name of the Messiah, how blessed you are! For the Spirit of the Sh'khinah, that is, the Spirit of God, is resting on you! 15 Let none of you suffer for being a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler in other people's affairs. 16 But if anyone suffers for being Messianic, let him not be ashamed; but let him bring glory to God by the way he bears this name.

Again, the Greek word for “on” in verse 14 is ἐπί. Context again shows that an already genuine believer is receiving subsequent empowering to withstand the trails that come as a result of bearing the name of Yeshua in the first place! Verse fourteen clearly shows the proper order in which to understand the “IN” vs. “ON” debate, namely, the Spirit saves an individual and then the Spirit subsequently empowers such an individual to witness for Yeshua.

What then is the “work of the Spirit” taught throughout the Apostolic Scriptures? Simply the subsequent empowering of an already saved individual to do things that he normally could not do under his own power. The crucial key to unlocking the debate over “IN” vs. “ON” is knowing that the Ruach HaKodesh firstly works “IN” us to bring about regeneration and then works “ON” us to bring about empowerment to do the Will of God. I personally think we should change our language from “IN” vs. “ON” to a more accurate depiction of “IN” as well as “ON.” The Spirit saves and the Spirit empowers! Why can’t we grasp these two important biblical truths simultaneously? The “Old Testament saints” were saved

³ According to Thayer’s and Smith’s Bible Dictionary (TSBD) ἐπί also means “on, at, by, before, over, against, to, across.”

exactly the same way as we in the 21st century are saved: by grace, through faith in the gift of God, namely, the Son of God and the Spirit of God within us.

Yet, in a very real way, the presence and ministry of the Ruach HaKodesh, as we know him today, according to the times of the TaNaKH, would not be fully realized until the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Yeshua (read entire chapter of John 14, specifically vv. 16-18, 26). Of this ministry and individual power of the Spirit, Ezekiel prophesied about in 11:19, 20 and 36:25-29. Again, this is also the same individual "spirit" spoken about in Joel 2:28, 29, which is confirmed by Peter in Acts 2:16-18. The Ruach HaKodesh was indeed present in the days of the TaNaKH, empowering individuals such as B'tzal'el and Shimshon, yet his ministry was slightly different than that of today because of his unique role in what happened after Acts chapter two. Perhaps it is best to think of his ministry in the TaNaKH as "less expansive" than as compared to today. "Less expansive" is not to be equated with "non-existent." A survey of the passages and wording used in "both testaments" will show that the "Old" does not exclusively employ a "ON" reading as ostensibly compared to an exclusive "IN" reading in the "New." Rather, a survey of the passages and wording used in "both testaments" will demonstrate "ON" and "IN" being utilized interchangeably to teach that the Ruach HaKodesh both saves ("IN") and empowers ("ON"), and that he does so consistently with the eternal plans and purposes of God the Father.

New Covenant and New Commandment Part One: What Is Meant By the Term "Old Covenant"?

Perhaps the best way to approach this topic is to first unravel the "mystery" behind Sha'ul's use of the term old covenant, found exclusively in 2 Corinthians 3:14⁴:

"What is more, their minds were made stonelike; for to this day the same veil remains over them when they read the Old Covenant; it has not been unveiled, because only by the Messiah is the veil taken away."

Respected author and teacher Tim Hegg of FFOZ notoriety has some critical comments on this topic worth quoting at length:

The "old covenant" (used only one time in Scripture, 2 Corinthians 3:14) is an expression used only by Paul to refer to a Jewish person who reads the TaNaKH apart from the illuminating work of the Spirit. When this occurs, the Jewish reader does not see Yeshua in the TaNaKH because a veil lies over his heart. As long as he reads the TaNaKH as mere letters without the illuminating work of the Spirit he will never see the Messiah of Whom the Prophets spoke, and the TaNaKH does not lead to salvation. But when these same Scriptures, the

⁴ Hebrews 8:13 indeed uses the words "old" and "covenant" in some translations, however, the word "covenant" is not found in the Greek of this pasuk.

Torah, Prophets, and Writings, are read with the veil removed by the Spirit, then these same words show him Messiah, and bring Him to saving faith. Without the Spirit the TaNaKH is the “old covenant,” but with the Spirit the TaNaKH leads to Messiah, the Torah is written on the heart, fulfilling the promise of the “new covenant” (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34).

So the writers of Scripture did not define “old” and “new” covenants as successive eras or generations, the “old covenant” being “back then” and the “new covenant” being “now.” Furthermore, for Paul, the “old covenant” is viewed as condemning, without faith in Messiah Yeshua. No one who is a member of the “old covenant” is saved. All who are in the “old covenant” are condemned because they are without faith.

Furthermore, Jeremiah’s “new covenant” is nothing more than the realization of the Mosaic Covenant on a national scale, for it is characterized by the phrase “I will write the Torah upon their hearts.” The very Torah that Israel rejected will, in the “new covenant,” be written on Israel’s heart by the Spirit. What is “new” or “unique” about this covenant is that its fulfillment will mark the only time in history when the nation as a whole walks by genuine faith in the Messiah.

So what is promised in the “new covenant” is the very thing that the remnant experienced throughout the history of Israel, i.e., genuine faith in God and in His Messiah, resulting in the Torah being written upon the heart (=becoming a reality in one’s life). Paul makes it clear that a remnant of true believers has existed in every generation (Romans 11:1ff). They must have, therefore, participated in the faith that Jeremiah prophesies for the whole nation in the future. This remnant, including Gentiles who have been attached to Israel through their saving faith, thus participate in the “new covenant” as the first fruits of the final harvest.

The “new covenant,” then, will not be fully realized until the House of Israel has the Torah written on the heart, from the least to the greatest, and all will be loyal to (=know) God. Until that happens, the remnant in each generation participates as the first fruits, being members of the “new covenant” which awaits its final closure in the salvation of the entire nation of Israel.

This being the case, the “new covenant” cannot be something that awaited the coming of Yeshua (though surely His saving work is the means by which the “new covenant” is realized). Those who by faith looked forward to the coming Messiah and trusted in Him for their salvation were as much members of the “new covenant” (as first fruits) as the nation of Israel will be in the end of days when she has the Torah written upon her heart. The “new covenant” is therefore not time-bound. Wherever there is genuine faith, whenever the Torah is written on the heart, there the “new covenant” is active.

Finally, the “old covenant” does not describe the life of God’s people before the coming of Messiah. It is a term coined by Paul to describe faithlessness—the very thing that defined the nation of Israel when she fell into idolatry, worshipping the Golden Calf. The “old covenant” is Paul’s term for living with the knowledge of Torah but not receiving it by faith, and therefore missing the very goal of the Torah, Who is Yeshua. Paul’s “old covenant” is reading the TaNaKH with a veil over it so that the glory of Yeshua cannot be seen. The “old covenant” is the Torah without faith. And when the Torah is accepted apart from

faith it comes as a letter of condemnation and death, not the life-giving tree God intends for His elect ones.⁵

The Remedy called “New Covenant”

Let us recap so far: Yeshua brought to its historical and spiritual fullness, the quintessence of the extant New Covenant at His last Passover, and set it on a “firmer foundation,” that is, brought the Temple Cult with its sacrifices to the goal, thereby bringing to their fullness, the earthly proxies the nation of Isra'el was using up to that point (Jn. 20:17; Heb. 7-9):

"For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matt. 26:28, RSV)

The Torah (the Law of Moshe) is the written essence of the covenant that the people of Isra'el took on as a never-ending agreement with God:

“But this [shall be] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer. 31:33-34, KJV)

Yeshua said, "Not one stroke of the Torah will pass away until all is fulfilled" (Mat. 5:18), so this “new covenant” must be an internalization of the very same Torah administered by Moshe, and built upon the previous covenantal promises. Unless we have gotten to the point yet of needing no one to teach us, the Torah is still in effect. All Scripture must be interpreted to agree with it (Isaiah 8:20). God does not change His mind. The nature of human sin demands the remedy called “new covenant.” The problem lies with historical Christianity (and some Judaisms) characterizing [concepts of] the Torah (viz, for the Judaisms: ethnicity; for the Church: obedience) as a means of justification in opposition to genuine submission to the Spirit of God. This has the consequence of hardening the heart, blinding the eyes, and eventually rendering God’s gracious promises as non-effectual on a spiritual level, leading to what Paul describes as “old covenant.”⁶ In this scenario, the covenant-member candidate is fooled into thinking that mere mechanical allegiance to the Torah or superficial membership in Isra'el will provide a remedy for the sins piling up in his spiritless life.

But "it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (cf. Heb. 10:4, where the “sin” referred to here must be “sins of the conscience”). Such was never the purpose for allowing animal blood. Bull and goat’s blood was

⁵ Tim Hegg, *Spirituality: Are We Better Off Now?* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 2-3

⁶ Specifically spoken of as a “veil” in 2 Cor. Chapters 3, 4.

intended for cleansing sins of the flesh, and within the context of approaching the earthly sanctuary.⁷ Galatians tells us Torah is meant to be our pedagogue (Greek: boy-tutor/guardian) leading the student to the Teacher of Righteousness; after that it is to bring us to full maturity:

"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as [coming] from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate [as] servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Cor. 3:5-6, NAS)

Speaking on an eternal level, letter without corresponding spirit has only the power to spiritually condemn. The "spirit" behind the letter is what the Torah being written on our hearts means. To be sure, the reality of the Ruach HaKodesh in our lives is what makes Torah submission possible in the first place! When we say something is "on our heart," we mean it preoccupies us. It is all but an obsession! It governs our everyday thought processes and functions. Consequently, if the Torah was designed by HaShem to be written on our hearts, it can hardly mean that it is something that we will no longer concern ourselves with after coming to Messiah! Written on the heart also means that we obey not necessarily because we are forced to, but because we long to. To be sure, compulsive, mechanical, heartless obedience will not lead an individual to the goal of acquiring genuine, heart-led trust and faithfulness to the Giver of the Law. The reason historic Israel failed God so miserably is because the faith of the majority of those "Law recipients" was eventually proven to be spurious. Observe God's "score-card":

"Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord." (Jeremiah 31:32, RSV)

Conclusion to Part One:

The word "new" in the covenant spoken about in Jeremiah is actually the Hebrew word "chadashah," which can at times refer not to something brand new in creation but rather something that has undergone a reformation in character and purpose, or a simple refreshment on a different scale. On one level Jeremiah is describing a "renewal" of some existing item. On the other hand, when it comes to the regeneration of the soul of a man, viz, "old covenant" man vs. "new covenant" man, the change is quite radical: all things do indeed "become new."⁸ Behaviorally speaking, the change can at times seem to occur over the course of time, but forensically speaking, the change is as different as life and death!

⁷ See my commentary *Towards Understanding Sacrifices and Atonement* for a fuller treatment on this topic, available at GraftedIn.com.

⁸ See 2 Cor. 5:17 where the Greek word "new" is *kainos καινός*.

The New Covenant to be ratified on a national level with Isra'el will envision the former promises made with Avraham, Moshe, and Dah-vid. It is not necessary to overturn a previous covenant in order for a later one to find fulfillment. To be sure, Galatians teaches explicitly that a later covenant cannot nullify a previous one (see Gal. 3:17). As a feature of the living Word of God, the new covenant is not time-bound. Rather, the new covenant springs to life whenever the veil is lifted and eyes are opened to the Goodness of the Mercy of God's Grace, specifically as has been historically demonstrated by the coming of his Son. It is better in many, many ways since Yeshua himself in fact inaugurated it before the foundations of the world were even laid!

I must now explain why I believe in some ways that the Biblical concept of "covenant" is synonymous with the Biblical concept of "commandment." I am not saying they are equal. Nor am I saying that they are the exact same things. I am simply saying they are inextricably linked to each other; they convey the same thoughts, intents, purposes, and meanings.

New Covenant and New Commandment Part Two: Covenant and Commandment

In Hebraic thinking the term "covenant" is synonymous with the term "commandment." I am of the understanding that in the Bible these terms and concepts are interwoven in such a way as to render them inseparable. But can my postulation be substantiated Scripturally?

In ancient suzerain treaties, if the situation changed for one party, a covenant could be amended (or renewed) to adapt to the new circumstance. But only what no longer fit would be revised; everything else remained in effect exactly as before. When looking at the Mosaic Covenant, was there something "wrong" between the parties of the existing or previous covenants that necessitated a renewal on God's part? Let's read the passage for the answer:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord." (Jer. 31:31-32, RSV)

Scripture goes on to describe that HaShem found fault with "them," viz, Isra'el. How did they "break" the first covenant? —By not keeping the commandments. Observe:

6. "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.

7. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples;

8. but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

9. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

10. and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face.

11. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day.

12. "And because you hearken to these ordinances, and keep and do them, the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love which he swore to your fathers to keep;

13. he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will also bless the fruit of your body and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the young of your flock, in the land which he swore to your fathers to give you.

14. You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle." (Deuteronomy 7:6-14, RSV)

Ariel, are you suggesting that mere commandment keeping is tantamount to covenant faithfulness? In "Bible times" is that all it took to be found righteous in God's sight? Before I get labeled as a legalist, let me demonstrate what I understand to be God's view of TRUE commandment keeping:

'For those who trust HaShem for the promises, the proper order for faith and obedience is set by the sequence in which the covenants were given. In other words, faith must precede obedience. But the kind of faith accepted by HaShem is one, which naturally flows into obedience. True obedience never comes before faith, nor is it an addition to faith. It is always the result of true biblical faith. To rephrase this in terms of the covenants: the covenant of promise (Avraham) must come before the covenant of obedience (Moshe). If we were to put Moshe first, attempting to secure those promises by obedience, we would be going against HaShem's order. (This, by the way, is the key to unlocking the difficult midrash used by Sha'ul in Galatians 4:21-31.) All we could hope for would be a measure of physical protection and a knowledge of spiritual things. But we could not receive justification or a personal relationship with the Holy One through obedience to the Torah; it all had to start with faith. Avraham came

before Moshe, but Moshe did not cancel out Avraham! The two complemented each other—as long as they came in the proper order.⁹

We see that "commandment breaking" was the reason that God needed to renew the covenant. In a sense, when Isra'el walked away from the covenant—when she forsook the commandments of God—she was declaring to God that she had no interest in him and ultimately this unfaithfulness was seen as grounds for divorce. Observe:

Isaiah 54:1-10: the faithful husband (HaShem) is seen promising the unfaithful wife (Isra'el) reconciliation unto himself after a brief period of rejection (verses 7, 8). Why did he reject her? Because she willfully walked out of the covenant agreement in order to pursue alien love, causing HaShem to act in accordance with his own Torah and give her a bill of divorcement (see Deut. 24:1-4).

Jeremiah 3:1-20: God is the husband and Isra'el is the wife. Verse 1a reinforces what Moshe stated in Deuteronomy. Verses 1b through 7 show that the unfaithful bride did not remain pure, but adulterated with another "lover," spurning the sorrow and fury of her first husband HaShem. In verse 8, after desiring her to return to him, HaShem hands her a bill of divorcement, based on her refusal to remain a faithful bride to him alone. In verses 11-15 the faithful husband pleads with his unfaithful wife to return to him and find forgiveness but she persists in her adultery. Thus, the unfaithful bride walked out on the marriage covenant to pursue other sexual interests, causing the faithful husband to write her a bill of divorcement. Did HaShem wish to write her this bill? According to Genesis he desires unity for eternity. But hard-heartedness drove his wife to force, as it were, God's hand of divorce upon her. She willingly left God; he always remained faithful waiting for her return.

Covenant Status: Earned or Freely Given?

So, is covenant status something we can earn on our own? Is there a commandment that we can keep that will turn God's Hand in our favor? We affirm that there is nothing that we can do to earn covenant status. God freely bestows covenant status upon those who surrender to his Salvation-working Power—the Spirit of Messiah Yeshua, Savior of Isra'el and of the whole world. Some might argue that grace is all we need. For them a Torah does not even figure into the scenario. What shall we "Torah-keepers" say then?

Allow me to recall some words from a previous parashah:

What [made] Avraham such a great role model of faith is that, not only did he trust in the Word of HaShem, but the LORD saw into his future and predicted that his offspring would also be taught how to trust in the Almighty. Let's look at [Genesis] 18:17-19,

⁹ Ariel and D'vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (FFOZ, 1996), p. 32-33

“ADONAI said, “Should I hide from Avraham what I am about to do, inasmuch as Avraham is sure to become a great and strong nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by him? For I have made myself known to him, so that he will give orders to his children and to his household after him to keep the way of ADONAI and to do what is right and just, so that ADONAI may bring about for Avraham what he has promised him.” (Emphasis, mine)

This is a fantastic statement from the mouth of the One who sees every human possibility! Would that we might have HaShem pronounce this blessing over our families today! What must we do? The divine tandem-like actions spoken of here must not be taken too lightly. Firstly, God promises to be faithful to make himself known to us. We like faithful Avraham are then enabled and subsequently covenant-bound to obey the Teachings of our Heavenly Father. Finally, such Teachings are uniquely designed to bring about a righteous behavior in our lives, aligning our lives to be the object of God’s righteous promises! To be sure, the syntax of the above p’sukim (verses) is hinting at that very reality (note the running continuity suggested by the connecting phrases “**so that**” in the quote above)! Furthermore, we must, like faithful Avraham, trust in the LORD against all unbelievable odds, to perform in our lives, the promise that he has given us through Yeshua our Messiah! What is that promise?

“Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose; because those whom he knew in advance, he also determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom he thus determined in advance, he also called; and those whom he called, he also caused to be considered righteous; and those whom he caused to be considered righteous he also glorified!” (Romans 8:28-30)

We usually stop at the first verse, but reading further informs us of our true identity in Messiah: righteous heirs according to trusting faithfulness, causing us to be called, as faithful Avraham was called, “righteous”!¹⁰

I like to imagine that grace steps in when we misunderstand the Torah as a document of legalism. Not all who approach God approach him correctly. Not all understand his gracious ways. Mankind has a human tendency to pervert God's gracious document into something it was not meant to be used for. To be sure, the Torah cannot, in and of itself, bring to the goal, the participant and his conscience (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14; Gal. 3:21b; Hebrews 7:11, 19). In fact, to use a “kal v’chomer argument” (light and heavy, argument from a weighty premise to a less weighty one), if actually participating in the sacrifices of ancient Isra'el could not bring about covenant membership, then surely all attempts to follow Torah today will ultimately result in failure without regeneration from the inside:

¹⁰ Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, *Parashat Vayera* (Tetze Torah Ministries, 2005), p. 8-9.

“For the Torah has in it a shadow of the good things to come, but not the actual manifestation of the originals. Therefore, it can never, by means of the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, bring to the goal those who approach the Holy Place to offer them. Otherwise, wouldn't the offering of those sacrifices have ceased? For if the people performing the service had been cleansed once and for all, they would no longer have sins on their conscience.” (Messianic Jews [Hebrews] 10:1, 2)

Only the Spirit of the Holy One, writing the Torah on the heart and mind, can bring the participant to the intended goal of surrendering to the Mashiach. With our natural mind, we read, "do this..." and "don't do that..." and we have a tendency to misunderstand the grace behind the words. Yeshua came to explain the gracious intent of every command, by explaining the primary thrust of the Torah in the first place: leading its reader to a genuine trusting faith in the Messiah found therein—namely himself!

Moreover, grace is needed when sin blinds our eyes to believe that covenant status is granted on the basis of ethnicity, whether natural or achieved. Historic Isra'el of the 1st century genuinely believed that by virtue of being born Jewish they were automatically guaranteed covenant status. What is more, from their point of view, if someone from non-Jewish stock wished to join the covenant people all he or she needed to do was convert to Judaism, hence my use of the terms “natural” and “achieved” respectively. Natural Isra'elites—those native-born—held to the prevailing theology that Torah was given to maintain the covenant status already acquired at birth. The “ger” (Hebrew for stranger, alien, etc.) was deemed as someone in the process of becoming a Jew via the vehicle of proselyte conversion.

Sha'ul went to great lengths to refute such teaching in his letters both to the Romans and to the Galatians. To be sure, if we apply this hermeneutic to those letters, instead of adopting a “grace versus law” hermeneutic, the Apostle begins to make more sense theologically and historically. I am convinced more now than ever that a foundational understanding of Paul's writings must take into account the historical fact that 1st century Isra'el reckoned herself as right-standing before HaShem on the basis of ethnicity (read as “being Jewish”) alone! She did not feel that keeping the Torah equaled positional (forensic) righteousness; she concluded—albeit incorrectly—that keeping Torah was the vehicle that one used to maintain covenant status already achieved either at birth or by conversion.

Conclusion to Part Two:

In closing, we affirm with perfect faith that genuine and lasting covenant status is granted to the individual who eventually exercises genuine faith in the Promised Word of HaShem—namely, the Messiah Yeshua. Such status is offered freely to both Jew and Gentile. Jewish people with natural lineage tracing back to

Ya'akov are in fact born with a "corporate covenant status" given freely by God and based on his promises made to Avraham. However, this does not automatically grant them the status of right standing in a positional sense. There is no such thing as "involuntary corporate righteousness" in the Torah of HaShem. For the native-born Jewish person, the proper sequence for the covenants is demonstrated when such an individual "graduates" from [mere] corporate faith and belonging towards personal faith in God. To be sure, it is only when God does his monergistic work of opening the eyes of the blind and drawing the individual into his covenant of faith that the person attains genuine and lasting covenant status—the kind of covenant status that is worthy of a place in the 'Olam Haba (Age to Come).

What place hath the Torah in the life of such an individual? The Torah comes alongside of the Promise (covenant status) and acts as a guarantor that the individual will also achieve behavioral righteousness, thus placing him or her on a direct collision course with the blessings of HaShem! Far from frustrating the grace of God, Torah compliments the grace of God!

New Covenant and New Commandment Part Three: Yeshua's NEW Commandment

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34, NIV)

Hasn't the Torah always commanded us to love one another? Absolutely. Take a look into the book of Leviticus:

"V'ahavta l'reyacha kamochah." [you shall love your neighbor as yourself] (Vayikra [Leviticus] 19:18b, Online TaNaKH)

The noticeable contrast in the p'shat (simple view, raw data) here is that love is shown to be compared with "yourself" whereas Yeshua compared love with "as I loved you." In Yeshua's quote, the shift in emphasis has moved from *myself* to the *Messiah*. So how are we to understand Yeshua's comparison and clarification of this basic command? How was Yeshua's love demonstrated to us? Again, let us allow the Torah answer:

"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." (Ephesians 5:2, KJV)

And again,

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;" (Eph 5:25, KJV)

We see that Yeshua's love has been fully manifest for us in that he willingly laid down his life for us. To be sure the Torah teaches:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13, KJV)

So we should be in basic agreement that Yeshua's personal example of giving his life is what was "new" about this command. But is this a completely "new" Torah feature? After all Moshe was willing to die for the sake of all Israel and even before that Yitz'chak (Isaac) was willing to die at the hand of his father Avraham. Yes, this type of love was "hinted at" all throughout the sacrificial system in the Torah, but was ONLY fully demonstrated in Yeshua's personal example.

But was Yeshua demonstrating this love on his own accord? Wasn't he in fact operating under the Perfect Will of the Father? Of course he was. Also, he did love us enough to willingly lay down his life for us. So it is both Yeshua's will to die and his Father's will that he should die. Father and Son demonstrated love in perfect harmony. In order to further understand Yeshua's willingness we only need to see what he also said about the love that has been demonstrated as first originating with his Father:

"And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare [it]: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:26, KJV)

But notice the bulk of 1 John chapter 4:

7. Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.

8. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.

9. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

10. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.

11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

13. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit.

14. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.

15. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

16. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

17. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world.

18. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.

19. We love, because he first loved us.

20. If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

21. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also." (1 John 4:7-21, RSV)

Any attempt to recognize Yeshua's love apart from recognizing and understanding God's love is not possible. The love of the Father and the love of the Son are inseparably tied together. But of course you already know this. So allow me to come full circle by quoting what Yeshua referred to as the two greatest commands in the Bible.

Scriptural Agreement

"Sh'ma Yisra'el, YHVH Eloheynu, YHVH echad! V'ahavta eht YHVH Eloheycha, b'chol l'vav-cha, u'v-chol naf'sh'cha, u'v-chol m'odecha." [Hear, Yisra'el: ADONAI is our God; ADONAI is one! And you shall love ADONAI your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.] (D'varim [Deuteronomy] 6:4, 5, Online TaNaKH)

"V'ahavta l'reyacha kamochah." [you shall love your neighbor as yourself] (Vayikra [Leviticus] 19:18b, Online TaNaKH)

There is little or no disagreement over the "concepts" explained by these mitzvot (Love God; love your neighbor) used by Yeshua and (at least the former) known in Jewish circles as the "Sh'ma" ("Hear!"). Every Jew knows that this is not the whole of the Torah, simply the hallmark of the Torah, the "cornerstone" of keeping the mitzvot. This is what Yeshua meant when he said that "all of the Law hangs on these two." Anyone, who correctly understands these two commands, is well on his way to keeping any of the rest that may apply to him (notice the context of the complete dialogue transaction, in the corresponding Scripture of Mark 12:28-34. The teacher of the Law is said to have been "not far from the Kingdom of God [vs.34]).

Do you see that the "new command" that Yeshua gave is the essence of the "covenant" that he ratified with them? Yeshua was stressing covenant faithfulness as it originates with a renewed heart. Remember, we learned in Part One that "old covenant" was really Sha'ul's shorthand for "an unregenerate state of being." Thus, Yeshua was imparting the practical knowledge of the ability and responsibility to walk into Torah now that God has opened the eyes of the blind! Be not controlled by your old nature (old covenant, hardened heart), rather, be ye controlled by the Spirit!

Commandment and covenant are terms of equal importance and usage. Yeshua's command was not new in this sense, only renewed as I stated in Part One. The covenant with Isra'el is not new, only renewed so as to accentuate the personal gift of the Ruach HaKodesh as he has come to dwell inside of the individual, per the promise of Joel and the fulfillment of the Book of Acts. When we wish to demonstrate love to God we must envision love in God's terms and that means to keep the commandment[s] or covenant[s]. To be sure, love without deed is empty love. Behold:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15, KJV)

And again here in James:

8. If you really fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well.

9. But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

11. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," said also, "Do not kill." If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law.

12. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

13. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment.

14. What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?

15. If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food,

16. and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?

17. So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (James 2:8-17, RSV)

What makes this passage here in James so interesting is that James correctly ties together the Torah principles of LOVE, FAITH, and COMMANDMENT KEEPING. In their genuine forms these three are inseparable.

We have seen that Yeshua quotes the two most important Torah themes in his answer given above (Love God, Love your neighbor). And we have now seen that James ties these two in to FAITH as well. The two that Yeshua quoted are not the only ones that make a person Torah-observant, yet they genuinely verify his change in status as a true (faith-filled) follower of HaShem. How so?

For if one truly loves HaShem, he will have no problem falling in love with Yeshua. Moreover, if he truly loves HaShem and Yeshua, he will have no problem loving his neighbor. The secret is unhindered love for HaShem, and all that he authoritatively represents! Anyone who genuinely loves the Father and the Son will have no problem wanting to keep the mitzvot. There is an unbreakable tie between the Father, the Son, your neighbor, and the mitzvot! Again, John agrees:

3. "And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4. He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

5. but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him:

6. he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

7. Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.

8. Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

9. He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still.

10. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling.

11. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." (1 John 2:3-11, RSV)

John continues in chapter 3:

1. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

2. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

3. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

4. Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

5. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

6. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.

7. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous.

8. He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

9. No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.

10. By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother.

11. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,

12. and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

13. Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you.

14. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

15. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

16. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

18. Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:1-18, RSV)

If our theology is weak in any one of these pillars of teaching (LOVE, FAITH, COMMANDMENT KEEPING) we will tend to be in an imbalance.

Conclusion to Part Three:

By Yeshua emphasizing, "as I have loved you," he was firstly giving us a personal example of what true love should look like. Secondly, he was reinforcing the love that the Father ALREADY had and has demonstrated for his own people by sending his Son to die for all humanity. By taking what Yeshua states elsewhere about love being perfected in faithful commandment keeping (covenant keeping) we see that his perfect example of love is one that we can and should follow as believers in him.

Love is what ties all of the covenants together, and love has always been the desired response of the Father. Avraham clearly loved God, Moshe clearly loved God, and Dah-vid clearly loved God. Yeshua would not come and teach anything less than what has already been taught in his Father's Torah: LOVE

We see that the Torah is the universal document for both peoples and it outlines God's plan for all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles. The "mystery of the Gospel" is that Isra'el is actually comprised of both Jews and Gentiles! To be grafted into the family of God is to join oneself to a Jewish Olive Tree without having to succumb to any kind of man-made conversion policy whatsoever! To this end, one becomes submissive to the instructions and righteousness of God, and inherits the blessings of God, whether he is of Gentile or Jewish stock!

To walk in disobedience and lack of trust is to invite God's punishment and withholding of blessing. To belong to the family is to mentally, spiritually, and physically accept the family rules. To this end, both Jews and Gentiles are expected to practice Torah submissiveness within their hearts and within their communities. To submit to God is to desire and allow his Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) to continually mold a person's life into the example of the Son of God, who vividly displayed a Torah-obedient and submissive life! This is the responsibility of a believer.

To suppose that faith outside of resulting action alone is pleasing to God is to misunderstand the valuable lesson explained by Ya'akov. Such faith is barren and of no value to God. Conversely, to mistakenly replace the genuine faith that the Torah teaches with halakhic rules designed to regulate one's identity with God, is to misunderstand Sha'ul's valuable lesson. Such actions also prove to be displeasing to God and unacceptable as righteous.

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