

פרשת
עקב
Parashat Ekev

Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25, Isaiah 49:14-51:5
John 13:31-15:27

Love, Grace, and the Torah
What is not being taught in modern theologies.

יב וְהָיָה | עֵקֶב, In this week's Torah portion, we read the following, תִּשְׁמְעוּן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה וְשִׁמְרֵתֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְשָׁמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְךָ אֶת-הַבְּרִית וְאֶת-הַחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתָּיִךְ: יג וְאֶהְבֶּךָ וּבֵרַכְךָ וְהִרְבֶּךָ וּבִרְךָ פְּרִי-בִטְנְךָ וּפְרִי-אֲדָמָתְךָ דְגָנְךָ וְתִירְשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהָרְךָ שֶׁגֶר-אֶלְפֵיךָ וְעִשְׂתֶּם-7:12 רַחַם צִאֲנֶךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתָּיִךְ לָתֵת לָךְ: *'Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you "His covenant and His grace" (lovingkindness, אֶת-הַבְּרִית וְאֶת-הַחֶסֶד) which He swore to your forefathers. 7:13 'He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock, in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you. (NASB)* Notice the definite direct object אֶת being used here, Moshe emphasizes the importance of the judgements (הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, Mishpatim) being listened to, kept, and performed (lived) in relation to the covenant and the grace of God. Moshe says *'Then it shall come about, because...'* He is opening this sentence with a clause expressing

an explanation or reason for something. What is interesting is how he describes keeping these judgements as a consequence of being in the covenant and under God's Grace (חַסֵּד, mercy, lovingkindness). Note the connection to obedience and the Lord being with us, along with His covenant of mercy (grace) that was sworn to our fathers. This is an important observation but we must be careful not to confuse the order of things based upon these Scriptures. In the English New Testament the word "grace" is always the translation for the Greek word χάρις (charis), a word that occurs in the Greek manuscripts 170+ times. In secular Greek of all periods this is a common word, and in both Biblical and secular Greek it was used with far more meaning than can be represented by any one term in English. The reason I say this is because there has been an over simplification of the word grace in modern theologies. This is important for us to understand in light of what we are reading here in the Torah portion. The Biblical use of the word Chesed (חַסֵּד, mercy, grace) is not always used in the same sense in Scripture, but has a variety of meanings. In the Tanach we have the words Chesed (חַסֵּד, mercy, grace) and Chen (חֵן, from the root chanan חָנַן). The noun may denote gracefulness or beauty, *Mishley / Proverbs 22:11 and 31:30*, but most generally means favor or good will. The Tanach repeatedly speaks of finding favor in the eyes of God or of men. The favor that is found carries with it the bestowal of blessings from God or from men. (See *Devarim / Deuteronomy 28*) This means that grace is not an abstract quality, but is an active, working principle, manifesting itself in a beneficent way (see *Bereshit / Genesis 6:8, 19:19, 33:15, Shemot / Exodus 33:12, 34:9, 1 Samuel 1:18, 27:5, and Esther 2:7*). These things illustrate the grace of God is connected to Moshe and the Torah as a part of the covenant relationship. We do not fear the nations because the Lord is on our side, and these concepts are found within this covenant relationship of the mercy of God. We remember the glory and power of God who delivered our Fathers from Egypt which is connected to His Chesed (mercy, grace). This is important as we see God's mercy being poured out upon a mixed multitude of peoples that were leaving Egypt. The fundamental idea is, the blessings were graciously bestowed (freely given), that was not the result of any claim or merit. What this illustrates for us is the God of Israel has great plans for our lives and He does not play favorites. This is what it says in *Acts 10:34*

that He (God) does not show partiality and is no respecter of persons. This week's Torah portion describes God's favor as being connected to our willingness to submit our lives and hearts to the Lord, unreservedly. This is also why Moshe wrote, *"9:4 'Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you. 9:5 'It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'"* (Deuteronomy 9:4-5 NASB) Obedience brings favor whereas rebellion brings disaster. When thinking upon the mercy and grace of God, what Yeshua was doing in His ministry, he was healing the sick in miraculous ways; and He would make statements such as, *"Which is easier, to say 'your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'"* (Luke 5:23). What is going on here in the Scriptures is the demonstration of the mercy of God being poured out upon His people. Yeshua worked powerfully in the gifts of the Spirit. We should ask ourselves, is the Lord working powerfully in my life each day just as I read in Scripture? I have an acquaintance whose ministry in Pennsylvania is working powerfully in the gifts of the spirit as he is involved in a healing ministry. He gives testimonies about the Lord's mercy and people being healed of all sorts of ailments. I have also read of the Ministry Team from Tiferet Yeshua in Tel Aviv Israel seeing new and exciting things and especially those of God's healing power. For example, believers are going out into Tel Aviv believing what Yeshua told His disciples *in Acts 1:8 "You will be endued with power to be My witnesses."* (NASB) The kinds of miracles occurring is when looking at someone the Lord suddenly gives a personal detail of his or her life through the Spirit. Then, when praying for someone in the streets who is in pain, they are healed and so the Lord God of Israel is saying to them, *"I see you. I know you. I love you."* . This healing brings a sudden awakening from their spiritual slumber to the fact that God is real. What is interesting is we see two groups, a Christian ministry and a Messianic ministry, which may be described as one who rejects the Torah as a way of life, the other who believes

the Torah as a way of life, but yet the mercy of God is empowering both for His glory. What this tells us is that God's mercy is not found in our ability to be perfect. His mercy is about our faith and motivation to serve Him. This is a very important detail that is coming out in Parashat Ekev. Let's discuss this further in this week's Torah portion.

This week we are looking at *Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:9-8:2*.

Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:9-8:2

7:9 'Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 7:10 but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face. 7:11 'Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them. 7:12 'Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers. 7:13 'He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock, in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you. 7:14 'You shall be blessed above all peoples; there will be no male or female barren among you or among your cattle. 7:15 'The Lord will remove from you all sickness; and He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known, but He will lay them on all who hate you. 7:16 'You shall consume all the peoples whom the Lord your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, nor shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you. 7:17 'If you should say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?' 7:18 you shall not be afraid of them; you shall

well remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: 7:19 the great trials which your eyes saw and the signs and the wonders and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. 7:20 'Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet against them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you perish. 7:21 'You shall not dread them, for the Lord your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God. 7:22 'The Lord your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, for the wild beasts would grow too numerous for you. 7:23 'But the Lord your God will deliver them before you, and will throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. 7:24 'He will deliver their kings into your hand so that you will make their name perish from under heaven; no man will be able to stand before you until you have destroyed them. 7:25 'The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, or you will be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. 7:26 'You shall not bring an abomination into your house, and like it come under the ban; you shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is something banned. 8:1 'All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your forefathers. 8:2 'You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. (NASB)

The most important aspect of the God that we serve is described here in Parashat Ekev when Moshe says, וַיִּדְעַתְּ כִּי-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא ט

הָאֱלֹהִים הָאֵל הַנֶּאֱמָן שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֶסֶד לְאַהֲבָיו וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתָו [מִצְוֹתָיו] : 7:9 *‘Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness (grace, חֶסֶד) to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; (NASB)* The Lord our God is faithful, He keeps His covenant, and his grace (חֶסֶד, lovingkindness) to a thousand generations. Note the connection to obedience and the Lord being with us, along with His covenant of mercy (grace) that was sworn to our fathers. Moshe makes this connection by saying, וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתָו [מִצְוֹתָיו] תָּו “*with those who love Him and keep His commandments.*” This is an important observation but we must be careful not to confuse the order of things based upon these Scriptures. Studying the use of the word grace in the Tanach, we learn that the grace of God is connected to Moshe and the Torah as a part of the covenant relationship. God’s mercy is poured out upon us so that we will humble ourselves to diligently obey the Lord our God. This is what Moshe is writing to us about in Parashat Ekev. Moshe writes that if we diligently obey the Lord our God, he will raise us up high above all the nations of the earth. Therefore, one conclusion is the mitzvot (מִצְוֹתָיו) are a blessing to God’s people. Our Father in heaven gave them to us in order to help us grow and develop qualities as being His children. The Scriptures say we are to live our lives in this way in order for life to go well for us. By keeping God’s commands, His blessing will come down upon us, and it is upon this that we will know the Lord is with us. By choosing to walk in His commands, we are humbling our lives to walk in His ways. This is what it means to be united with the Lord spiritually and physically, taking our lives and walking according to the Spirit. And yet while we have these commands so near to us, the distance that exists between us and God is so great that no human feat, no effort, and no human holiness is able to overcome that distance due to sin.

The major concepts coming out of the Torah portion are the dependency of love and grace. In this world, the way people act towards one another, love is dependent upon something. From the secular world, love only lasts as long as the person’s appetite or desire is satisfied. The Mishnah states the following in the *Pirkei Avot 5:16* about love and its dependency.

Mishnah Pirkei Avot 5:16

כָּל אֶהְבָּה נִשְׁהִיָּא תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, בְּטִל דָּבָר, בְּטִלָּה אֶהְבָּה.
וְשִׂאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, אִינָהּ בְּטִלָּה לְעוֹלָם. אִיזוּ הִיא אֶהְבָּה
הַתְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זוֹ אֶהְבֵּת אֲמָנוּן וְתָמָר. וְשִׂאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר,
*Any love that is dependent on something, when that thing perishes, the love perishes. But [a
love] that is not dependent on something, does not ever
perish. What's [an example of] a love that is dependent
on something? That's the love of Amnon and Tamar. And
[a love] that is not dependent on something? That's the
love of David and Jonathan.*

The rabbis say that any love that is dependent on a specific reason, when the reason disappears, so does the love. A love that is not dependent on a specific reason, that love will never cease. This is an important comment from the rabbis since often our feelings of love are only based upon certain qualities of the other person. If we consider the qualities of others, the obvious reason we are attracted to another person, such things as beauty, a good sense of humour, or kindness, these things are able to create that initial attraction. The rabbis in the Mishnah state if this is the sole basis for love, the instant these qualities cease to exist, so will the love. On the other hand, the Mishnah continues and says that if love is not based on the other person's qualities then that love will never cease. Note the Mishnaic example of David and Jonathan, where Jonathan had pure intentions for David to save his soul from his father Saul. The obvious question is if love is not based on qualities, what is it based on? In the Torah we are commanded to love one another. How does the Lord command love? This is also an important question. The basic idea is if we love others, we should do something for his or her benefit. By doing so, we demonstrate our love for them, and it is in this act of doing something that brings about feelings of true love for that person. This is how the command to love is fulfilled. Now consider how we love the Lord, and we do something about it to serve the Lord by humbling our lives according to His Torah.

Take for example, the Torah commands us to love another person. Have you ever wondered how the Torah can command us to love an-

other person? Rabbi Hillel said to the prospective convert, “*What you don’t want for yourself, don’t do to your fellow,*” note Yeshua said the same thing (*Luke 6:31*). It is in the act of doing something for another person that brings out the feelings of love for that person. This is why the Torah commands us to love one another. The everlasting love of God is not based upon what benefit one receives from the relationship. Note how important this is for us in our relationship with others. In our relationship with God, we fail, we fall short, and we seek to return to where we once were but in a different capacity, in the power of the spirit and in truth. Our relationship with God is based upon the investment one puts into the relationship. Note how the Lord has invested greatly into each one of us. How much have you invested in the Lord? Note how the marriage relationship fits this description. Rather than seeking personal benefit, satisfaction and fulfillment in a marriage, one must learn to seek how to give and benefit one’s spouse. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot refers to the true love between Jonathan and David. Nothing makes a person feel as good as when one gives to others, whether individuals or communities. It is in this way the Lord has given us His Torah, His loving instructions for our lives. In *Vayikra / Leviticus 19:18*, the text states “*And you shall love your fellow as yourself.*” What is different about this command is how love is an emotion that is also personal.

The *Talmud Bavli Shabbat 31a* states the following:

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 31a

שוב מעשה בנכרי אחד שבא לפני שמאי א“ל גיירני ע“מ שתלמדני כל התורה כולה כשאני עומד על רגל אחת דחפו באמת הבנין שבידו בא לפני הלל גייריה אמר לו דעלך סני לחברך לא תעביד זו היא כל התורה כולה ואידך פירושה *There was another incident involving one gentile who came before Shammai and said to Shammai: Convert me on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot. Shammai pushed him away with the builder’s cubit in his hand. This was a common measuring stick and Shammai was a builder by trade. The same gentile came before Hillel. He converted him and said to him: That which is hateful*

to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study.

This applies to each one of us in the sense of perspective regarding the command to love one another, and in the sense of our relationship with God. This is the foundation of the whole Torah because what we do not want done to us, why do we do so to our Father in heaven through our sin? This is the fundamental importance of the commandment. Rashi states this is a major command of the Torah. Loving one's fellow is the basis of the whole Torah where the Talmud, answers this question with the explanation that there are two types of commandments. One type of commandment deals with the relationship between man and God. The other type deals with the relationship between man and his fellow human beings. Based upon this, Rashi explains what we find in scripture that God is referred to as the "*friend*" of man. On the simple level (peshat), it is to be understood that a person should not do to another human being what the person would not like done to himself. This is the bare minimum requirement for relationships between men in order to be able to coexist in peace and harmony. On the deeper level (sod) there is a message alluding to the relationship between man and the Lord God of Israel. Just as we would dislike if someone sins against us, it is in the same way we shall not disobey God's instructions. This is why the midrash warns, "*What is meant by He will not suffer your foot to slip? When all men are in danger of slipping into Gehenna, you will not slip. Similarly, the verse, To Me belongs vengeance, and recompense, their foot will slide in due time (Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:35) means that when the foot of the wicked slides, you will not slide, for it is said, He will keep the feet of His holy ones (1 Samuel 2:9).*" (Midrash Tehillim 121 Part 2) The holy ones are a reference to God's people who put into practice God's Words. This interpretation of not doing to others is a difficult thing to be consistent with in our lives, and especially in our hearts. Some of the commentaries (Ibn Ezra, Malbim and others) point out that the literal translation of this verse reads "*And you shall do acts of love to your fellow as to yourself.*" The rabbis explain that a person is obligated to take an interest in and provide for others as one would want for oneself. On this level it is not sufficient to merely abstain from doing to others what one does not want for oneself; rather,

we are expected to actively help others. This is important since the act of performing love for another person helps us to keep God's Word in our hearts, and decrease the chance of taking vengeance on them and even upon our enemies. The midrash speaks of hell (gehenna), not slipping into hell, and so naturally draws in the concept of sin that leads to hell. Remember, the Midrash and the Mishnah speaks of love not being based upon another persons qualities. The answer is found in the principle of determining our hearts to love one another. This is why Yeshua said in *John 13:35* "*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" (NASB) This is a central principle in the Torah, that affects our relationship with our Father in heaven. The sages teach us that it is the act of doing something for another person that brings out feelings of true love for that person. The same result occurs in our relationship with God in obeying the commandments when performed out of love for Him. Everlasting love is not based on what satisfaction or benefit one receives from the relationship but on what investment we put into it. Note gain how even if the other person loses some of the qualities this will not result in diminishing the love, because it is not based on these qualities. Rather, this true love is created by a bond of mutual care and interest for each other. The God of Israel never loses His qualities. But we do, and we love the Lord because He first loved us, just as is written in the gospels. This is also why repentance becomes a central principle in our lives before God. We fall short and so we seek to turn from our sinful ways and return to the ways of the Lord. In addition to this, note how the command, *Vayikra / Leviticus 19:18*, the text states "*And you shall love your fellow as yourself*" we are to love others as we love ourselves. There is this component of loving self. The only way we can obey this command is to diminish the self and selfishness which brings out selflessness towards others. This causes us to realize the ultimate satisfaction in life never comes from amassing benefits and assets for ourselves. (*Consider the Word of Faith teaching where one is seeking the benefit, the blessing, and the financial gain. Can you see how significantly this approach and attitude diverges from the truth of Scripture?*) On the contrary, nothing makes a person feel as good as when one gives to others, whether individuals or communities. This giving to others is said to be amassing wealth in heaven. When we manage to achieve everlasting love (*something that*

is not character dependent) in our personal life, we are one step closer to experiencing the days of true peace and harmony based upon what the Scriptures are teaching us. This is the principle of *Matthew 6:19* “*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth, and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal*” *6:20* “*But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor...*”

What we have been discussing is the grace (רַחֲמִים, lovingkindness, mercy) of God to a thousand generations falls under this rabbinic concept of “*the everlasting love of God.*” This everlasting love is not based upon a satisfaction or benefit that one receives, but on the initial investment that one puts into a relationship. So the concept of obedience to the commands is not meant for us to get something out of the relationship. This is what the Lord God our Father in heaven does for each one of us. He invests into our lives, and so when or if we lose some quality that we had initially, this will not result in diminishing His love, because His love is not based on these qualities. Rather, this true love of God is created by a bond of mutual care and interest for us. This is what Yeshua the Messiah did by going to the cross laying down His life for ours when He did not even know us. These things are designed to bring an awakening from our spiritual slumber to the fact that the Lord God is real and loves us greatly, so much so, as we see in both the Christian and Messianic ministries, the Lord God working powerfully to bring glory to His Name! This again reveals to us that God’s mercy is not founded upon our ability to be perfect. His mercy is about our faith and motivation to serve Him.

Ibn Ezra has the following to say concerning these things:

Ibn Ezra on Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:12 Part 1

עקב. כמו לעולם עקב שכר באחרונה וטעם הפסוק הראשון שומר הברית ששמר ברית אברהם ואתם אם תהיו מאוהביו ישמור עוד הברית ואם היית מאוהביו ואהבך וברכך והרבך *consequently i.e., the end reward — as in, “always, to the end” [Psalms 119: 112]. The meaning of the earlier passage “He keeps the covenant” [: 9] is that he kept the covenant of Abraham; but if you are among “those that love him” [: 9], then He will continue to keep the covenant. If you are one of*

“those who love him”, then He will love you, and bless you, and increase you (this being the meaning of “the covenant and the kindness” [: 9]).

Note how Ibn Ezra states this is the meaning of *“the covenant and the kindness”* of God. He references loving the Lord by keeping His commands. This also speaks of the necessity of Torah obedience in the life of a believer! If you love the Lord you will obey him right? This is what is missing in modern theologies today. If the Torah was taught as a way of life, many of the heresies that are being accepted and taught in the church today on alternative life styles would simply evaporate.

Sforno also has the following to say concerning these things:

Sforno on Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:12 Part 1

וְהָיָה עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמָעוּן. הִנֵּה הַמֶּלֶךְ צִוָּה אֶת כָּל אֱלֹהִים, כְּדֵי שֶׁתִּזְכּוּ שְׁיִשְׁמַר לָכֶם “הַבְּרִית וְהַחֲסֵד”, וְזֶה שֶׁאַתֶּם תִּשְׁמְרוּ “הַיּוֹם” לַעֲשׂוֹת מֵאַהֲבָה שְׁלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פָּרֶס וְהוּא בְּשִׁבִיל זֶה, יִשְׁמַר לָכֶם הַבְּרִית וְהַחֲסֵד. וְהִיא עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמָעוּן, *Moses explains that the reason why the King, i.e. G’d, commands them to observe all these commandments is in order to be able to fulfill the promises made to their forefathers regarding them. The people were meant to observe these commandments out of a feeling of love for G’d, not because they did so in order to earn a reward. [If I understand the author correctly, the words וְהַחֲסֵד וְהַבְּרִית in the phrase וְהַחֲסֵד וְהַבְּרִית וְהַחֲסֵד, are to establish reciprocity of G’d’s loving care for the patriarchs, the parties to the covenant, and their descendants’ feeling of love on their part towards the Creator. Ed.]*

Sforno speaks of reciprocity in the relationship, which is the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit. He states the reason for the giving of the commands is so the Lord could fulfill the promises made to our fathers, and the people were meant to obey out of love for the Lord, not in order to receive a reward. The performing of the commands, Torah obedience, was not designed for us to earn

a reward! Note how modern theologies also teach Israel earned her salvation in the sacrifices speaks contrary to what the rabbis believe. This also speaks contrary to what we read in the NT (*Hebrews 10:4*). This is because the scholars are setting up a presupposition for their own theology of faith alone without works (without Torah obedience). Remember the Apostle Paul calls Torah obedience walking according to the Spirit. Obeying the commands are also not designed for us to see signs and wonders. Taking such an approach is wrong! What is being explained here in the Scriptures and in the rabbinic literature is the demonstration of the mercy of God being poured out upon His people. Yeshua worked powerfully in the gifts of the Spirit, and these blessings were only achieved when one relied solely upon the mercy of God. The kinds of miracles occurring in these days, God's people going into the streets, praying, and people being healed is a testimony to this, especially in light of two groups, both the Christian and Messianic ministries operating in the power of God by His the mercy for His glory. The power of God is found in mercy, in faith, and in our love for Him.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he listed his Jewish credentials (*Philippians 3:5-6*) saying, "*Circumcised the eight day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews...*" Paul also said, "*As to the kind of righteousness that could come from the law as I understood it, I lived it blamelessly by the most rigorous ethnic standards.*" Paul doesn't mean he was without sin, but that he followed the Torah completely according to Moshe and the rabbinic standards. He offered the proper sacrifices at the proper times, he studied Torah, he lived by all the purity laws, etc. He was a young protégé of the greatest Pharisaic leaders having studied even at the feet of Gamaliel. As a result, the Pharisees assigned him the task of leading a delegation against the believers in Yeshua at that time. He had access to power, money, prestige, and he lost those things when he answered the call of Yeshua on the road to Damascus. Paul goes on to say to the Philippians:

Philippians 3:7-11

3:7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 3:8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for

whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 3:11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (NASB)

Paul was in a position to say *“No, I have been down that road, and the Torah itself does not have the power to save. The gift of the Spirit does not come by the works of Torah, etc.”* This is why Paul wrote that he counts it all loss. He realized the power of God is found within His mercy towards His people. This is an important perspective. The gift of God is His mercy, and when we rely solely upon the mercy of God, it is only then His power is made available to us. So the question is, *“do you know the power of God and the power of the resurrection in your life?”* I hope your faith is not based upon the performance of a Torah command? Moshe opens his statements with a clause expressing an explanation saying *“Then it shall come about, because...”* emphasizing the importance of the judgements (הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, Mishpatim) being listened to, kept, and performed (lived). He describes keeping these judgements as a consequence of being in the covenant of God and under His Grace (רַחֲמֵי, mercy, lovingkindness). The connection to obedience and the Lord being with us, along with His covenant of mercy (grace) that was sworn to our fathers. The power of God is found in faith, love, and motivation to serve and to seek Him. The Lord then by His mercy, empowers us to overcome sin in our lives so we may bring glory to His Name!

Consider how modern theologies have taught us to ignore the Torah and Moshe’s words on the life of God’s children as it is connected to sinfulness, unfaithfulness, and the curses at the end of the book of Devarim / Deuteronomy. Most modern people and even some in the church would simply shrug their shoulders at this part of the bible. One reason is those who rely upon modern theology have no idea what it means to be a son of Abraham and no sense of the value of the bless-

ing promised to Abraham's children. The reason being it is taught the Torah has no place in the lives of God's people as being an obligatory part of our faith. In the modern world, there are counter-cultures which are teaching people to find their own identity by defining themselves in antithesis to the previous generations. This speaks contrary to what we have going on in the biblical text. The Bible teaches us we are to remember the previous generations so we do not repeat what they did, we hold fast to the truth of the Lord God of Israel, and we do not have a disdain for the expectations of past generations, because we serve an eternal God who never changes. Popular culture portrays it as cool to reject the Bible, and to take hold of witchcraft or some other form of rebellion that is contrary to the biblical values. We are called however to take hold of biblical values and to take hold of the Lord God our Father in heaven and His Messiah Yeshua and to join with them by walking in holiness, righteousness, justice, and truth.



