

## פרשת ויקהל / Parashat Vayakhel

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MATSATI.COM / Rightly Dividing The Word of G-d  
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### Has Righteousness Conceptually Changed in the Church Today?

#### **This Weeks Reading List:**

Torah: Exodus 35:1-38:20

Haftarah: 1 Kings 7:40-7:50

B'rit HaChadashah: 1 Corinthians 3:11-18; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

#### **Exodus 35:1-3**

*35:1 Moshe assembled the whole community of the people of Isra'el and said to them, "These are the things which ADONAI has ordered you to do. 35:2 On six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is to be a holy day for you, a Shabbat of complete rest in honor of ADONAI. Whoever does any work on it is to be put to death. 35:3 You are not to kindle a fire in any of your homes on Shabbat."*

As I read through the mitzvah (commandment) to observe the Shabbat, I am reminded of a Christian sermon I heard from Romans chapter 3. The sermon dealt with observance of the Torah's commands, and the preacher continued with a discussion on the issue of recognizing our inability to keep the Law, and the need for HaShem's mercy.

#### **אל-הרומיים 3:20-21**

*יען במעשים אשר צוּתָה התורה לא יצדק כל-בשר לפניו כי ממקור התורה יצאה דעת החטא:  
ועתה מבלעדו התורה יצאה צדקת אלהים לאור אשר העידו עליה התורה והנביאים:*

#### **Romans 3:20-21**

*3:20 For in his sight no one alive will be considered righteous on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands, because what Torah really does is show people how sinful they are. 3:21 But now, quite apart from Torah, God's way of making people righteous in his sight has been made clear - although the Torah and the Prophets give their witness to it as well - (CJB)*

In the sermon I heard the preacher comment that sometimes we attempt to justify ourselves before G-d. Some examples were listed concerning self-righteousness. (i) I study my bible more than other people, (ii) I am a preacher in your church G-d, (iii) I try to help people, serve in a soup kitchen, etc. As the list continued it suddenly struck me the Apostle Shaul (Paul) is writing that we are not righteous before G-d by "doing the Torah." What struck me was the preacher was giving as examples of righteousness before G-d; however, he is not Torah observant. The

apostle Shaul (Paul) was talking about Torah observance when he wrote down verse 3:20. The preacher was giving examples which he considered would make him righteous before G-d yet he did not even measure up to the standard of Torah observance (i.e. eating kosher, observing the Shabbat, etc). One certainly cannot boast before G-d of his righteousness when one is Torah observant however what impacted me was the form of righteousness some in the church believe to have outside of observing the Torah. The Torah was given to us as an instruction on how to live our lives as a special and holy nation before G-d.

## **Has Righteousness conceptually changed in the Church today?**

Being Torah observant one takes their mind and body modifying ones behavior for the purpose of bringing glory to G-d in obeying his commandments. In doing so our souls are blessed by a disciplined life and having a reverence for G-d in the way we live our lives which naturally brings us to a point of having a right heart, which I believe leads to what Yeshua spoke in Mark 12:28-30. (*Mark 2:28 One of the Torah-teachers came up and heard them engaged in this discussion. Seeing that Yeshua answered them well, he asked him, "Which is the most important mitzvah of them all?" 12:29 Yeshua answered, "The most important is, 'Sh'ma Yisra'el, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad [Hear, O Isra'el, the LORD our God, the LORD is one], 12:30 and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your understanding and with all your strength.'* (CJB)) See also Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

I believe this portion of scripture (*Romans 3:20-21*) is interpreted to be Jewish Law, the Law of Moshe, or the Torah. Historically this section of scripture has been misinterpreted in three ways:

### **Torah misinterpreted**

1. No one will be considered righteous by G-d on the ground of doing the good works the Torah requires.
2. No one will be considered righteous of G-d on the ground of doing the good works the Torah requires, because no one is able to live up to the Torah's demands (with the exception of Yeshua).
3. No one will be considered righteous by G-d on the ground of the bad works the Torah requires.

### **Torah misinterpreted, Point 1**

This is a problem because of what we read in the scriptures which Yeshua said in *Mark 12:28-30*. The Torah requires our trust is in G-d, loving Him with all our heart, soul, and strength. The fact is the Torah was given by G-d to be obeyed. If that is so then why should obeying it not lead to righteousness? Furthermore, the apostle Shaul (Paul) quotes Moshe's pronouncement that the person who does these things, who performs the righteous deeds commanded by the Torah will attain life through them. (*Romans 10:5 For Moshe writes about the righteousness grounded in the Torah that the person who does these things will attain life*

*through them. and Leviticus 18:5 You are to observe my laws and rulings; if a person does them, he will have life through them; I am ADONAI. (CJB).*

## **Torah misinterpreted, Point 2**

Generally those who hold to the misinterpretation in point 1 reiterate the concept of the human inability of keeping the Torah. This teaching however is not found in the apostle Shaul's argument or elsewhere for that matter in the book of Romans or anywhere in the Bible. *James* says *2:10 For a person who keeps the whole Torah, yet stumbles at one point, has become guilty of breaking them all. (CJB)* This refers to rebellion against keeping a particular command of the Torah while claiming to uphold it. James is not saying that everyone necessarily rebels (*James 2:10-11*) remember in *Acts 15:10* where Peter objects to placing on the Gentiles a yoke saying "neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." The yoke is referring to a mechanical legalistic rule keeping regardless of the heart attitude. This isn't a yoke of G-d but a yoke of legalism provided by men (see *Acts 15:10, Matthew 23:2, and Mark 7:5-13*). The Torah is expected to be obeyed and G-d expects people to obey it. This is why Moshe said in *Deuteronomy 30:11-14*:

### *Deuteronomy 30-11-14*

*30:11 For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach. 30:12 It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, 'Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' 30:13 Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, 'Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' 30:14 On the contrary, the word is very close to you - in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it! (CJB)*

The Apostle Shaul (Paul) also quotes from this verse in *Romans 10:6-8*. It would be very strange to think G-d had given the children of Yisrael an instruction to observe the Torah that was impossible to keep, one in which the penalty of violating such is death. The fact is the children of Yisrael fell short of keeping the Torah, just like you and I fall short of keeping the Torah, we sin. I have to comment here, honestly, it is easier for me to sin than to keep the Torah. But the Torah also includes a procedure for dealing with sins; this procedure is the sacrificial system. In fact, a large portion of the Torah is specifically devoted to the sacrificial system, the design of the Mishkhan (tabernacle), the mercy seat, what is to be offered upon the altar and the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat, etc. This system offered forgiveness to the repentant person who brought the required offering. Yeshua has affected this portion of the Torah and when the Messiah Yeshua died, the Torah provided a framework within which a person might be saved, on the assumption that the person trusted G-d in everything and in no way relied upon his own self-righteousness.

The reason point 2 is wrong is because there is no reason or support in scripture that a person could not live up to what the Torah demands. The Torah is not an impossible standard; rather it is a standard of faith, trusting in G-d, and of following his system of repentance and sacrifice for obtaining forgiveness. The resulting restored relationship is then considered righteous in His sight. Do you have a restored relationship that is considered righteous in G-d's sight according to the sacrificial system in the Torah? You can if you trust and believe in G-d's Messiah Yeshua.

### Torah misinterpreted, Point 3

The worst thing to assume is the Torah requires prideful self-justifying legalistic righteousness (i.e. bad works of the Torah). The Torah specifically teaches against such a mindset and the B'rit HaChadashah quotes portions of the Torah and drives the point explicitly that the Torah is not about prideful self-justification. The Apostle Shaul (Paul) calls the Torah holy just and good: *Rom7:12 So the Torah is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good. (CJB)* so the Torah certainly cannot be something which demands bad works of self-righteousness. The Torah is not inferior to the B'rit HaChadashah. Don't assume the Torah is bad, or something less than the Messiah Yeshua, this would certainly be a problem with the character of G-d. In the second century, there was a heresy called the "heresy of Marcion" (see references [1-5]) which regarded the Tanach (OT) as inferior to the B'rit HaChadashah (NT) and the G-d of the Tanach as inferior to the G-d of the B'rit HaChadashah. Have you fallen into the Marcion heresy? Do you believe the Tanach is somewhat less than the B'rit HaChadashah?

### Conclusions

The point I want to make is today in Christianity, a lot of believers view the Jewish Law (Torah) as being inferior, inadequate, legalistic, a producer of pride, something that is separate from G-d's grace, or has been superseded now that Yeshua has come. I believe this explains why the preacher tried to give reasons for righteousness in which he considered to be higher than observing the Torah. Because anyone observing the Torah or upholding the Mosaic Law is blind, foolish or misled; consequentially, since Jews observe the Torah, using this premise as a standard, then Jews are blind, foolish or misled. In this way anti-Semitism is made a virtual pillar of the Christian faith. Is it any wonder why the "gospel of Yeshua" with this kind of interpretation and implications is unacceptable to the Jews?

The works of the Law are certainly works which are produced from the observance of the Torah; however what is the reasoning behind one's desire to observe the Torah? Is Torah observance being used improperly? Torah observance needs to be a condition of the heart, a choice, and a result of our having been saved in the shed blood of Yeshua the Messiah. It is not meant for a way to earn merit towards salvation, it is not meant to earn self-justification. The Torah really shows people how sinful they really are. There is a good book which I recommend which clarifies this issue of legalism, heartfelt observance, and mercy titled "Gospel and Law: Contrast Or Continuum." [6]

The Torah shows us how much we are missing the mark, it brings to our awareness our missing the target of righteousness that is set before us. The Torah also works as a guide toward right behavior, not only before a Holy G-d, but also between those who live around us, in our community, our brothers and sisters, etc. The point is the Torah is not something that is totally unachievable, however, the moment we fail it is as if we have failed all. It is then we need to follow the Torah's procedure for Teshuva, which includes repentance and sacrifice. Today it is through G-d's Messiah Yeshua we can properly perform proper Teshuva. Without G-d's Messiah Yeshua, it is impossible to have a restored relationship with Hashem.

## References

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4. Mead, G.R.S., Gospel of Marcion Fragments of a Faith Forgotten, London and Benares, 1900; 3rd Edition 1931.
5. Price, Robert M. The Evolution of the Pauline Canon
6. Daniel P. Fuller, Gospel and Law: contrast or Continuum?, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980.

## Be Blessed in Yeshua our Messiah!

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הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,  
"Yeshua" King Messiah forever and ever