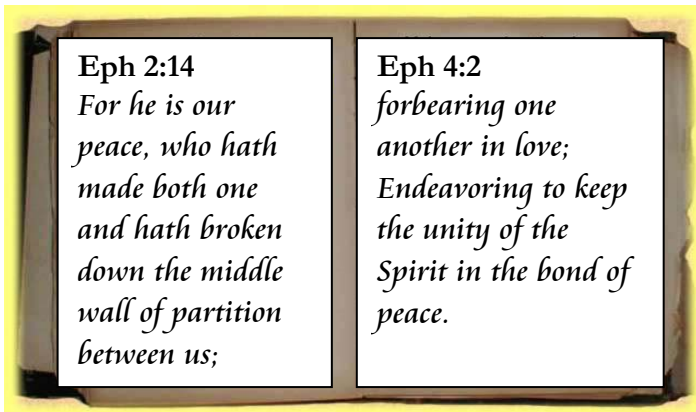


THE NEWS AND TEACHINGS OF

ECHO Ministries



Beth Shalom — — — — Instruments of Peace

One in Messiah

One in Yeshua

Halachah #2

In the last issue we were investigating the concept of Halachah. We were examining the life of David and the seeming contradictions between when God allowed David to “break the rules” with impunity—and when He didn’t.

In part to address this very issue, the rabbis developed the system of halachah. So what is halachah?

Halachah is the rabbinic attempt to help people avoid getting zotted for inadvertently breaking the law.

Authentic halachah was succinctly described by Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks in his book Traditional Alternatives as follows: “To be a Jew was to be subject to Halachah, the vastly ramified provisions of Jewish Law. That Law, in turn, was derived either directly or indirectly from the Torah, the written record of Divine Revelation at Sinai. Rabbinic Judaism, as the ongoing application of the oral law, gave Torah its authoritative interpretation and safeguarded its observance through protective enactments and decrees.”

In other words, Halachah teaches the way along which the Jew is required to walk in accordance with Torah. Halachah is the application of the Torah to life.

This is not necessarily bad—even though in modern Christian thought, anything dealing with discovering the law is accused of legalism.

But much of the Hebraic roots movement has unfolded as people have searched out the law and its meaning in our lives. And some respected Messianics, including Rebetzin Farber in Toronto, whom I’ve met, and Dan Juster as well, say positive things about a Messianic perspective on halachah.

Of course, the key would be the *Messianic* perspective. Regular old halachah, or letting the rabbis (or any other authority figure, for that matter) define each fine detail of what is or isn’t right, is a good recipe for being really bound up in genuine legalism. In fact, if we’re honest, disagreements about the fine points of obeying God have been the source of much schism in the gentile Christian world. Even though most gentile Christians would say that they don’t agree with the concept of having some higher human authority dictate the fine points of how we live, in reality just such differences have engendered many of the denominations we see today.

In Bible History On-Line, in the article “A Fence around the Law,” it tells us that:

“By building a ‘*hedge about the law*’ or fence around the law, the Jewish leaders would be able to develop a

system of rules and interpretations that would keep people as far from sin as possible. For example, if the law said not to work on the Sabbath day, they would make up volumes of rules that indicated exactly what actions constituted work. [This is why in an orthodox hotel, your toilet paper will be pre-torn for you for Shabbat, and the elevator will stop at every floor automatically, so you don't have to work by pushing the buttons.]

Following these fine points made a huge separation between the so-called righteous and the sinners. It also made following God a burden that Jesus Himself said was too heavy to carry. It also allowed the leaders appear to be righteous, to approve and disapprove of people and to control all of the religious affairs within Judaism.

Jesus was diametrically opposed to these leaders, their teaching and traditions, and He said that they *'made the Word of God void'* and they were *'making disciples of hell.'*

We can't follow man's ideas; we have to follow God. But in doing so, we can so easily slip back into man's ideas about what God just said! So, what now? Well, how about we look in the Brit Hadashah, the New Testament.

I Tim. 1:5-9 tells us, "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law *is* good, if a man use it lawfully. Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane . . ."

So pursuing the law itself is not a bad thing, but a good thing. In fact, let me be perfectly clear on this, I am teaching you to follow the law! After all, Matt. 5:19 says, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." So I am seeking to obey the law and to teach you to follow it.

But we must keep in mind the end, or purpose, of the commandments—love, and faith. And that's always been the purpose. Abraham was called the Father of the Faithful, but the evidence of that was in how he walked. What does Heb. 11 say? By faith, he did this, by faith she did that, by faith, by faith, by faith—what? By faith they produced works.

In Micah 6:6-8 the prophet says, "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, *and* bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, *or* with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, the fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Faith, love, mercy, justice—these have always been the root and the purpose, the whole intent of the law.

So now, to the crux of the matter. Over the years, I have seen many people who were passionate to serve the Lord. Some of them expressed this passion by searching out the scriptures and trying to apply them, well, religiously. That's not wrong! In fact, I believe a normal and healthy step in the faith walk is a period devoted to seeking to diligently obey all that you can find out about what God wants.

Without that diligence, your faith becomes mushy and your walk becomes unclear. In fact, if we are careless to seek out all that He desires, we may experience a sudden clarification—like David did when He moved the ark. Especially when dealing with the things of God, we need to make sure we're checking out the way He wants things done.

But, sometimes, especially early in a believer's life in Messiah, God will overlook the small things, focus on the heart, and validate His commitment to us. That's some of what happened with the shewbread. David wasn't trying to get around a rule, he was very much depending upon God's deliverance, and the rule at that time wasn't the issue.

But we must be ever vigilant to avoid ignoring God's commands outright. He gave them for a reason, and

we must be ever searching through study and through the guidance of the Ruach HaKodesh, the Holy Spirit, to understand the heart of the matter. Did God care if David counted a bunch of people? No! Did He care if David turned his reliance away from God and onto the physical, or if he started thinking that he actually owned the army and the country? Absolutely. He cared enough about that to make it perfectly clear by sending a plague and other punishments.

So we *must* be ever growing in applying the Word of God to our messianic daily life.

And here, we must be cautious about another pitfall. Sometimes, in their zeal to serve God, new believers, or newly refocused messianic believers, start applying to modern situations ritual laws that had an original purpose distinct to ancient Israel, and in the process *totally miss* the original point God had in mind. It's the point God wants to make that we must focus on.

For instance, did you know that God says not to wear clothing made of mixed fibers? Well, if you all took off that kind of fabric right now, you probably wouldn't be let back into your workplace, for they frown on people working in their birthday suits!

God wanted His people to wear good quality clothing. Do you remember that the poor settlers in America wore lindsay-woolsey? That's a fabric of mixed linen and wool, and the fibers rub one another the wrong way, and it falls apart quickly. Cheap fabric. Not God's way. The issue there is the quality, not the precise definition.

Or, how about tithing? [Did you ever notice that New Testament pastors may not preach about the Sabbath much, but can and do wax eloquent about tithing?—just a cynical aside, there! According to some ministers the whole law was done away except for tithing.] But do you know that, depending upon how you read the scriptures, God didn't want just one tithe, or 2, but 3!! Whoa!—30% *before* offerings? But remember, that was without any tax (God was their king), and 10% was for them to spend before Him at the festival, and the other 10% was only for 2 years out of 7, and that was for the poor.

There were some people in England who tried to apply that kind of tithing literally a few years ago, tithing before taxes, and they found out that because of their high tax

rate, they were actually going into the hole before paying any other bills. Does God want His people in poverty? No. Does He want them to put Him first in all things, including their money? Yes. How you actually do that, though, has to be between you and God. You can, and perhaps should, seek counsel, but I should not be imposing upon you my understanding while you're in the process of seeking to understand and obey Him!

So, how do we apply halachah to another interesting subject, the Sabbath? If you'll notice, Brent has not yet published his list of 70 do's and don'ts in observing Shabbat. And he won't.

Do we believe in the Sabbath principle? You bet. Do we believe that you will be blessed as you pursue observing the Sabbath? You bet. Do we believe that you are at exactly the same place in understanding it and applying it in your life as we are? Not hardly.

We know people who have started observing the Sabbath principle by lighting the candles on a completely wrong day of the week because that was the only time available to them—and God blessed them, even though my whole experience made me want to say, You're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong! But God didn't say that. He said, "Bless you my faithful children who are seeking to serve me more perfectly."

The observance of Shabbat is far more than just stopping work for one day. It's an issue of faith and trust. In Heb. 3:18-19 we see that the people of Israel had to wander in the wilderness because they were unable to enter the land due to lack of trust, or lack of faith.

We know that we are free in Messiah Yeshua, and that we are not "bound" by a bunch of rules about Shabbat. However, I have seen people so free about the Sabbath that now all seven days of the week are full of work, they are pulled 90 ways to Christmas, as my dad used to say, and while they may spiritually rest in Him, the physical rest and the spiritual break He ordained in our weekly schedule is now non-existent. If they don't find a way to change their schedules to a more Godly rhythm, without that rest, their bodies will eventually break down. And without a regular time to refocus on their Lord, their spiritual lives will suffer, too.

You see, we just need to focus on Him. If we continue to focus on Yeshua, seeking His will in our lives, He'll lead us to a closer and closer walk with Him, and we will better reflect His love and His life. But we do not need to police our neighbour to see if he's gotten the exact same point at the exact same time as we have.

I'd like you to picture something in your mind's eye. Imagine a beautiful, brilliant, cross consisting of pure white light. That's Yeshua, that's His perfect way, that's our whole focus. Then see, all around that light, in all possible directions, thousands of millions of crystal prisms, catching the light from Him and refracting and reflecting it until there are pieces of rainbows dancing all around, producing a symphony of harmony, beauty, color, and light.

That's how we can be as we seek to walk in Messiah. A believer's halachah will be a marvellous blend of scripture, Spirit, and communion with fellow

believers. We're all coming toward Him from a different direction and at a different speed. But when we capture that combination of walking in His light, the world won't notice what we do, but will see His beautiful brilliance.

And that's the whole point of what we do and what we say: pointing the world toward Him, and making sure that we never block the light. So as we seek to grow together, to become *echad*, one, in Yeshua through the Holy Spirit, the Ruach HaKodesh, we need not focus on our differences. In time, He'll show us what things we must cast off and what things must be perfected, and He'll show each of us those things in His time. Let us instead focus on Him, on that pure, white, light, and (John 17:21) through unity in Him, let the world believe.

By Susan Fiedler

"I know not by what methods rare,
But I know this, God answers prayer.
I know not when He sends the word
That tells us fervent prayer is heard,
I know it cometh, soon or late,
Therefore we need to pray and wait.
I know not if the blessings sought
Will come in just the form I thought.
I leave my prayers to Him alone,
Whose will is wiser than my own."
(Author unknown)

Echad Ministries
125 Cloudland Dr.
Bristol TN 37620