

ONE TORAH FOR ALL

Zerubbabel ben Emunah
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Speak Not the Names of Other Gods

Shemot (Exodus) 23:13

“And in all things that I have said unto you take heed; and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of your mouth.”

It seems the verse above is a common verse those who set out on the journey of returning back to Torah find at some early point in that journey. When one finds this verse the typical reaction is to stop saying the names of pagan deities. This typically includes all the English names and titles for YHWH our Elohim, all of whose origins are questionable at best. The simple truth is that YHWH never referred to Himself with those English names and titles; therefore, it would be best if we did not refer to Him with those English names and titles as well. We should refer to Him in the same manner that He referred to Himself. We should refer to Him as He commanded us to refer to Him, with the same name and titles.

In the process of discovering the meanings and origins of the English names and titles of YHWH our Elohim one begins to discover that there are many other words in the English language that have their roots in the names of pagan deities. Typically when one begins to discover this, a purging process is set out upon in which one begins to remove from his own usage those words from his own vocabulary. This list is varied from person to person, and depending upon how much effort one puts into searching out the etymology of words, this list can become quite long. In large part this is due to the above passage of Scripture.

Along with the English names and titles for YHWH that are tossed aside would be words such as: “bible,” “church,” “holy,” “glory,” and “Christian” in its various forms, as well as many other words. Even everyday words such as “flower,” “horizon,” the names of the days of the weeks, the names of the planets, and even the word “the” seems be traced back to the name of a pagan deity. What one soon discovers is that most of the words in the English language have dubious roots.

This exercise has its benefits. However, it is not entirely needed when one looks at what the actual commandment is saying. In the English translation it seems to indicate that we should not even say the names of pagan deities. However, is that really what it says in Hebrew? Let's investigate!

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְשֵׁם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
לֹא תִזְכְּרוּ לֹא יִשְׁמַע עַל פִּיךָ :

There are two words that will open the door of understanding to this passage. The first word is תִּזְכְּרוּ – “tazkiru” which means “to mention.” The root word is זָכַר – “zakar,” which means to “store in memory,” “to remember.” The form of the word here is the hiphel stem giving us the meaning to “mention.” This refers not just merely to speaking a name, but speaking a name with reverence. How do we know this? It is through the investigation of this next word that completes our understanding of this passage. It is the Hebrew word יִשְׁמַע – “yishama” which means “to be heard.” However, since the root word here is שָׁמַע – “shema” which means “to hear with the intent to obey” the speaking of these names is for the intent to obey the deity spoken. In other words YHWH is commanding us that these names are not to be spoken reverently, for when one speaks the names reverently, he has the intent to obey that which he serves and worships.

The plain and simple meaning of this Torah command then is simply to avoid speaking the names of other gods in a worshipful manner with the intent to obey that god which is referenced.

So, the question becomes: when a person speaks, for instance, of a flower, is that person worshipping the Greek deity Flora? In most cases, he probably is not. The same principle can and should be applied to all the English words which have their roots in the name of some pagan deity. But this is actually a matter of the heart and of the relationship between YHWH and each person. However, let us be careful not to judge our brothers and sisters and thus treat them harshly if they have a different understanding from us in this matter.

Lest we be misunderstood and misquoted, let us clarify one point in this matter. We are not suggesting in any way that it is acceptable in the eyes of YHWH our Elohim that one can use names and titles to refer to Him that He never used. It is not acceptable to substitute other names and titles for YHWH which He has not used. This is wrong and it is sin.

For example, let us address a special case. In Hebrew there is no distinction and there is not a separate word for YHWH as our Elohim and a pagan god (elohim); they both are the exact same word, with the same spelling and the same vowel points. It is the practice of this author to only use Elohim to refer to YHWH, for the title “god” actually comes from the name of a Teutonic deity. So we should no more call Him “god” than we should call a golden calf “YHWH.” Do you see the parallel?

Furthermore, instead of using the Hebrew word “elohim” to refer to pagan deities, since the English word “god” is of pagan origin anyway, we use that to refer to pagan deities. It just makes sense. Now the usage of this name does not mean in any way that I or those reading it have any intention of obeying or worshipping or serving in any way any pagan “god.” But in order to make a strong distinction between the two, we do this for the sake of clarity.

Philippians 1:9

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment;

As a person searches out these matters his knowledge must be upon the foundation of love.

Qorintyah Aleph (1st Corinthians) 8:1

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols; we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

We need to be careful that we do not use the knowledge and understanding YHWH has given us as a weapon against His other children. We do have an obligation to share with others that which He has given us, but once we have spoken that which He has laid upon our hearts to share, then we are out of the picture. What the other person(s) does with it is between him and YHWH. The truth is that while He can use us to bring light, we cannot actually give that light into others' hearts.

Kepha Bet (2nd Peter) 1:5-6

5 Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, on your faith supply offering; and on your offering knowledge;

6 and on the knowledge integrity; and on the integrity perseverance; and on the perseverance awe of Elohim;

It is a good thing that we prove all things as Scripture teaches us to do. But in the gaining of that knowledge it must be based upon our faith in Him. Furthermore, one's knowledge must have self-control in it.

Most of us have seen men who have gained a little knowledge and then begin acting in a superior way towards others. It doesn't really matter what that knowledge is, knowledge simply tries to elevate itself over others who do not have that same knowledge.

However, when we add on top of knowledge the character trait of integrity, meaning to be reliable and strong, it keeps in proper check the knowledge we gain. Notice that integrity is added on top of knowledge so as to hold down and keep in check that knowledge so that it cannot puff itself up. So, instead of the knowledge being or becoming in control of us, we are in control of that knowledge through the strength of His Spirit through the characteristic of integrity.

There is one last thing we need to discuss concerning the commandment of not speaking the names of other gods.

Shemot (Exodus) 20:3-5

3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 You shall not make unto yourself a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

5 You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them, for I YHWH your Elohim am a jealous El, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate Me,”

I am confident those reading this study would have in their hearts the intent and the desire to keep and obey the above commandments. The commandment not to speak with reverence the names of other gods actually goes right along with those above. But let us consider one other aspect of this that one may not have considered up to this point.

In our world today there are many things about which people are passionate. It is this passion that can many times get one into trouble with his Creator. For example, many people are passionate about some sports. They have their particular team they follow and perhaps even a particular player or players of that sport. When they talk about their passion there is a reverence present. We have all seen this, perhaps even been guilty of it. When this happens this is actually breaking the commandment not to speak the names of other gods. How so?

Please consider that just because some things do not have their roots in ancient pagan practices it does not make them any less idolatrous. It is the very act of elevating anything at all and speaking that which one has elevated which produces an idol. Then, speaking the name of that which has been elevated is breaking this commandment. It does not necessarily have to have its roots in ancient times.

This is not only true of sports in general, but it can be anything at all one might elevate. For example, one’s car, spouse or children, actors or actresses, political figures, or any number of other things people have a tendency to elevate. If one elevates something, anything at all, and then speaks its name, then the commandment has been broken.

This one must guard against at all times in order that the commandment is preserved and one’s life is pleasing to YHWH our Elohim.

Matithyah (Matthew) 20:25-28

25 But Yeshua called them unto Him, and said, “You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

26 It shall not be so among you; but whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant;

27 and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant;

28 even as the Son of man came not to serve, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Let each person be careful not to condemn another brother or sister who is not purging out of his or her vocabulary those words which he feels led to stop saying. After all, YHWH is the Master of that fellow servant. We are not the Master! Nor are we to “lord” it over our brothers and sisters in Mashiach.

ABBA YHWH, please give us Your great wisdom in this matter that we might walk in love and compassion towards one another in the love of Mashiach; for it is in His name we pray. Amein.

Shabbat Shalom

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