

ONE TORAH FOR ALL

Zerubbabel ben Emunah
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The Weightier Matters of Torah

Matithyah (Matthew) 23:23

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and anise and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the Torah, justice, and mercy, and faith; but these you ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone.”

There are many today who are returning to our heavenly Father’s house to obey Him in keeping His Torah. However, as good as this may be, one of the drawbacks of this movement at present seems to be its focus upon what it means to keep Torah. Many seem to have this idea that the commandments which stand above all others are the keeping of Shabbat and the mo’edim. Please do not misunderstand me on this point, these things are important. However, as Mashiach points out, they are not the most important. According to Mashiach Yeshua those things that are most important when it comes to keeping Torah are justice, mercy, and faith. Furthermore, each one of these “weightier” matters of Torah applies to each and every one of His commandments. We shall examine each one of these in this study.

Before we get into the subject of justice, mercy, and faith, let us remind ourselves of the context in which Yeshua is teaching in the opening passage of Scripture. He is dealing with tithing. In fact, He states that it is right and good to tithe and that His followers should tithe according to the commandments of Torah. But tithing will have to be the subject of another study. We just need to be aware of the context in which justice, mercy, and faith have been brought into focus for us so that when we work at doing these three things we do not become guilty of doing the opposite of what those to whom Yeshua was speaking on that day were guilty of doing. They kept the less weighty matters and left undone the weightier matters of Torah. We do not want to be guilty of keeping the weightier matters and leaving the lesser matters of Torah undone. The basic idea Yeshua is wanting us to guard against is doing some commandments and leaving others undone. We need to do the whole Torah!

Have you ever had another person ask you how long you have been keeping Torah? Or perhaps you have asked this question yourself of another person? Generally speaking, what is implied with this question is how long a person has been keeping Shabbat and the feasts. However, as we have already seen, this is not really what we should be focused upon at all. This question

and all such questions actually come very close to being Pharisaical in nature. How so? Consider that the Pharisees had a very strict code of conduct, not all of which was bad, by the way! However, they lived by all the fences they had erected around each of the Torah commandments. It was by these fences they measured their own piety as well as the piety of others. In short, they lived by a manmade set of rules and regulations. These manmade rules and regulations focused upon the external. The Torah commandments given to Moshe by YHWH cannot rightly be boiled down to a list of dos and don'ts. To make such an attempt is to fall into the pit of a Pharisaical mindset.

Matityah (Matthew) 5:19-20

19 "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I say to you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Please note that Mashiach Yeshua taught us that if one was going to have a place in the kingdom of heaven, then the righteousness of such a person has to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. Why is this true? It is true because in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven one must understand as well as practice justice, mercy, and faith every day of his life. These things need to be one's mindset. Justice, mercy, and faith need to be an intricate part of one's life and serve as a foundation upon which everything he does is based.

To enter into the kingdom of heaven one must be working on both his external actions as well as the internal condition of his heart. This activity can only be rightfully achieved through the joint work with the Ruach Qodesh (Holy Spirit). We as humans cannot do some of the needed work alone within our hearts and minds. However, the Ruach Qodesh will not do it without our help either. Our Creator is a perfect gentleman and He never goes where He is not welcome. So the only way to do this properly is for the person to walk with Him to accomplish that which needs to be done, both in his actions as well as in the condition of his heart and mind.

Justice

B'reshit (Genesis) 18:19

"For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and justice; in order that YHWH may bring upon Avraham what He has spoken about him."

Please note that YHWH specifically chose Avraham so that he would teach his offspring how to do and live in righteousness and justice. So, for a person to be considered by YHWH to be a legitimate offspring of Avraham, such a person would need to be doing righteousness as well as justice.

Righteousness and justice are two sides of the same coin. Justice is treating one's neighbor with love and respect according to Torah. Justice is loving him as one loves himself. Justice is having the ability to rightly judge the actions of another, while righteousness is being able to do the same concerning oneself before YHWH.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 16:19

"You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous."

Doing justice is doing what is right because it is right in the eyes of our Creator. Doing justice is not veering away from the path of right for any reason. Please note that justice is often spoken of along with righteousness. Why? This is because doing justice is more than just doing what is right in His eyes according to what is written down in His Torah. It is about hearing and obeying His Voice. This is ultimately what YHWH desires from us: to hear and obey His Voice moment by moment throughout one's life. When a person does that, he cannot help but do both justice and righteousness.

Mishle (Proverbs) 21:3

***To do righteousness and justice
Is more acceptable to YHWH than sacrifice.***

This proverb speaks to the precise point Yeshua was making in the opening passage of Scripture in this study. Yeshua was chastising the Pharisees and scribes because they were focusing upon sacrifices rather than upon the weightier matters of the Torah. In their case their sacrifice was counting out the seeds of these things so their tithing would be with great precision. They did not want to give one seed too few or too many. But they did not understand the record of Scripture in which YHWH's desire is not sacrifice, but rather a pure heart filled with His Spirit.

Yirmeyah (Jeremiah) 22:15-17

15 "Shall you reign, because you strive to excel in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him.

16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Was not this to know me?" says YHWH.

17 "But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it."

YHWH sent Yirmeyah to the king of Yehudah (Judah) with a message. Part of that message was dealing with justice and righteousness; specifically, that king Shallum was not doing these things like his father before him did them. Doing justice and righteousness in part means knowing YHWH. One cannot do these things without knowing Him. It was well with king Shallum's father, but it was not well with him because he was not doing justice or righteousness.

The implication of this passage seems to be that if one is not doing justice and righteousness then such a person is doing the opposite of them, which includes being covetous, shedding innocent blood, oppressing others, and being violent towards others. The only way to rightly guard against these things is to do justice and righteousness according to YHWH.

Micah 6:8

“He has showed you, man, what is good; and what does YHWH require of you, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your Elohim?”

The words Yeshua spoke to those scribes and Pharisees that day seem to be a direct reference to these words spoken through the prophet Micah. What is it YHWH requires of us? He requires us to act justly towards all regardless of who they may be. This is justice. YHWH requires that we love kindness, which is mercy. YHWH also requires that we walk humbly with our Elohim, which is the essence of faith.

Justice is not an option to be done or not done according to however one feels about it at any given moment, or towards those to whom one selects to give it while withholding it from others. No, justice is to be given to all at all times by those who follow YHWH and make Him their Elohim.

Matithyah (Matthew) 12:18

***Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen;
My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased;
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He shall proclaim justice to the gentiles.***

Matithyah speaking from the prophet Yeshayah points to this passage being fulfilled in Yeshua. What is of particular interest in this study is that YHWH’s chosen Servant Mashiach would proclaim justice to the gentiles.

Justice is for all people everywhere. If Yeshua, the Servant of YHWH, came to proclaim justice to the gentiles, can we do any less? Let us practice this daily in our lives understanding that it is one of the weightier matters of Torah.

Mercy

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 13:17

“And nothing from that which is put under the ban shall cling to your hand; that YHWH may turn from the fierceness of His anger, and show you mercy, and have compassion upon you, and multiply you, as He has sworn to your fathers.”

The first thing we need to understand about mercy is that the mercy of YHWH is conditional rather than unconditional as is commonly taught by the church today. In order for YHWH to be

able to show us His mercy, one has to listen to and obey His commandments. One aspect of His commandments is that He has put certain things under a ban, which means that those things which He has placed under a ban are not to be a part of one's life in any way. In particular, such things are not to be brought under one's roof, for if they are then the one who does this comes under the ban along with the item in his hand.

Mishle (Proverbs) 28:13

***He that covers his transgressions shall not prosper;
But he who confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy.***

Remember our discussion today is focused upon the weightier matters of the Torah, in particular, justice, mercy, and faith, and what it means to be doing these things in one's life. To have mercy as a part of one's life then begins by not attempting to cover up those things that one does that breaks the Torah of YHWH. One must confess those things to our heavenly Father, and then forsake them and move towards YHWH rather than pursuing those things which are not pleasing to Him.

Mishle (Proverbs) 14:31

***He that oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker;
But he that has mercy on the needy honors Him.***

Now we begin to see concrete ways in which we may do mercy. We can express mercy to others by helping those in need. When we do this we honor YHWH. Why? This is because we are walking in the manner in which He desires for us to walk.

Matithyah (Matthew) 12:7

"But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless."

There are many times in the Tanak in which we learn in one way or another, that YHWH does not desire our sacrifices nearly as much as He desires for us to show mercy. Here Yeshua is affirming this truth to all of us. One can offer each and every sacrifice to the letter of the Torah, but if one fails to show mercy to his fellow man, what does he really have? Nothing! For he who fails to show mercy will receive no mercy!

Yeshua illustrated this beautifully in the parable about the servant who owed so much to his master that it was beyond his ability to pay. But when he begged for mercy his master had compassion on him and forgave him all his debt. However, when that same servant went out from his master and found a fellow servant and began beating him for the pittance his fellow servant owed him, and his fellow servant begged for mercy, he had none. When his master heard about this wickedness in the servant upon whom he had compassion he sent his guards out to arrest the servant and threw him in prison and gave him over to the torturers until his servant would pay all that he owed his master. Be sure of this one thing: if you want mercy,

you had better learn how to show it on a daily basis! This concept is what makes mercy one of the weightier matters of the Torah!

Faith

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 32:4

***“The Rock, His work is perfect;
For all His ways are justice;
An Elohim of faithfulness and without iniquity,
Just and right is He.***

This passage reveals to us why faith is one of the weightier matters of the Torah. YHWH is an Elohim of faith. If one does not have faith, he cannot have YHWH. So it is imperative that one has this type of faith in order that he might also have YHWH.

Please understand that there are different types of faith. Every person has faith of some kind. But the kind of faith one needs to have is that which is intimately associated with YHWH. But what exactly is this faith of which we are speaking? Many people use this term, but how many actually know what this term means? Let’s see if Scripture can help us understand this word.

Ivrim (Hebrews) 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.

Whenever the subject of faith comes up this passage is sure to be referenced at some point in the conversation. However, it is for this very reason, because of its common reference, that this passage actually stifles a clear understanding of this word “faith.” So let us see if we can go beyond this passage in our understanding of exactly what it means to have faith.

The Hebrew root word is אמן – “aman” which means *depend upon*, or *rely upon*. This root usually is extended into either the masculine or feminine form of the word for “faith,” אמון (emun) or אמונה (emunah) respectively. This word means to *trust*, hence *faith*. It is when one’s actions show that a person trusts in YHWH that such a person is exhibiting faith in Him. This is one of the weightier matters of Torah. So armed with this brief definition let us examine this weightier matter.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 32:20

***And He said, “I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end shall be;
For they are a very perverse generation,
Children in whom is no faith.”***

Please note the importance of having faith according to this passage. YHWH hides His face from those who have no faith. When Scripture says YHWH hides His face, this is an idiom

meaning YHWH will not regard their prayers or have any regard to the trials and tribulations which life throws at them. It means YHWH will not help them. Also, please note YHWH states that He considers those with no faith as being part of a perverse generation. This is not a good place to be, for sure!

Mishle (Proverbs) 14:5

***A faithful witness will not lie;
But a false witness utters lies.***

Those who practice the weightier matters of the Torah do not lie. This is especially true when it comes to witnessing in a matter concerning the Torah. For if one has YHWH, he tells the truth, for the Spirit of YHWH guides him in what to say in all matters.

Habakkuk 2:4

Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him; but the righteous shall live by his faith.

This one is particularly telling as it contrasts having faith with being puffed up and arrogant, or prideful. If a person is full of pride, he cannot also have faith. They are mutually exclusive of one another. There is something humbling about faith because he who has faith understands his place before an Almighty Elohim; whereas, pride has the mindset of “Look at me!”

Matithyah (Matthew) 17:20

And he says to them, “Because of your little faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there;’ and it shall be moved; and nothing shall be impossible to you.”

Perhaps the most significant thing about what Yeshua taught us in this passage concerning faith is that He likens it to a seed. In order for a seed to grow, first it must die. Only then can it produce fruit. So the seed of faith that YHWH places within one’s heart does not stay as a small seed if we plant it and nurture it so that it grows into a great and healthy plant producing fruit.

Now, Yeshua could have likened faith to any seed whatsoever and it would have been a good analogy. So why use a mustard seed to depict faith? One reason is the size of the seed compared to the size of the fruit bearing plant. For its size the mustard seed produces one of the greatest size plants. But perhaps the most significant reason is how long it takes to go from seed to fruit, which is in only one growing season (about 6 months). What we should learn from this is that when one comes to Mashiach Yeshua within the space of one growing season a properly trained person should begin to bear fruit for His kingdom.

So, let’s summarize the weightier matters of the Torah. Yeshua taught us that the weightier matters of the Torah consist of three things: justice, mercy, and faith. We have learned that YHWH expects the children of Avraham to exhibit the trait of justice. It is instructive to note that it is the children of Avraham who are his children by faith who are of this covenant. To do

justice in one's life is to live as Yeshua taught us by treating others the same way we would want to be treated by them.

The trait of justice then laps over into the trait of mercy, living in such a way as to give to all those around us mercy. It is the only way in which we shall receive it; we must give it. Those who do not give mercy shall receive no mercy in the Day of Judgment.

And finally the trait of faith in one's life is living a life that is totally and completely pleasing to YHWH our Elohim. It is simply making YHWH the Elohim of every aspect of one's life. Faith is trusting YHWH for everything, and perhaps even more importantly, simply recognizing that every good and perfect gift is from His hand. No person has anything that he has not received, thus he has absolutely no room for pride in anything whatsoever!

So next time someone asks you how long you have been keeping Torah, or if you are tempted to ask someone how long they have been keeping Torah, stop and really think about what you are asking or being asked. Perhaps you could ask a much clearer question or ask for clarification. For example, "Are you asking me how long I have been keeping Shabbat and the feasts?" Instead of focusing upon these lesser matters of Torah, let us focus upon the weightier matters! How long have you been doing justice, mercy, and faith?

ABBA YHWH, teach us to walk in all the weightier matters of Your Torah that our lives may be pleasing in Your sight; in the name of Mashiach Yeshua. Amein.

Shabbat Shalom

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