

SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-08-05—THE LAW & RIGHTEOUSNESS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Obedience to the Law of God is required for salvation. While I have not yet met anyone of the *ekklesia* who does not accept this, many are ignorant about much of the Law. Generally speaking, when there is a reference to “the Law” in the New Testament, it is referring to Scripture contained within Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—the Pentateuch, which is a reference to first five books of the Old Testament. However, when these books are read it seems the focus is on the rituals of the Holydays, the stories about ancient peoples, tithing, or a few other points. All “scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for **instruction in righteousness**.” (2 Tim. 3:16), so have you have diligently studied the *entirety* of the Law?

The scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees had a depth of understanding of the statutes, precepts, testimonies, and judgments that is lost upon many today. Today, I think the Law is largely ignored, perhaps due to lost knowledge of ancient practices and understanding. I would venture to say that we today, in the *ekklesia*, fall far short of even the Jewish religious leaders in the time of Christ. But we should study ALL aspects of the Law contained in the Pentateuch. Yes, there are a number of points of the Law that many observe including the Sabbaths, Passover, Holydays, clean and unclean meats, and tithing. But the Law contains MUCH more than that. No one can obey the Law if they do not read and understand it. This brings me to something else that Jesus Christ said:

MATTHEW 5:17-18, 20 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. ... 20 For I say unto you, That **except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

Let that sink in. “**Except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**” The righteousness of God’s people—the *ekklesia*—MUST EXCEED that of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees! They knew the Law inside and out but how many of the *ekklesia* can say that? If the righteousness of the priests and Levites is insufficient but our righteousness must exceed theirs, then the crucial question is what is righteousness? By definition, “unrighteousness is sin” (1 John 5:17) and “all sin is the transgression of the Law” (1 John 3:4); therefore, *righteousness* is the perfect keeping of the Law.

It is interesting that Christ NEVER condemned the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees for **not** knowing the Law. Instead, He excoriated them in Matthew 23 where He called them hypocrites seven times because “they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and

lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers." (Matt. 23:4). They understood that righteousness was the result of obeying the Law of God, so they had a problem.

The problem for all humanity is the simple statement: "The wages of sin *is* death" (Rom. 6:23). In fact, "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), meaning that EVERYONE has been condemned to death because "**there is none righteous**, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). From the time of Adam and Eve, God has offered eternal life to any who are righteous but human nature and wicked spirits have thwarted every attempt. Job testified of this. So, the ancient religious leaders determined that if righteousness is only unattainable through strict obedience to the Law, then THAT could only be accomplished by imposing traditions and rules that forced people into compliance. This is what Paul accused them of:

ROMANS 10:2-3 For I bear them record that **they have a zeal of God**, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and **going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.**

It is quite clear that it is impossible to attain righteousness through perfect obedience to the Law because SIN brings death. Instead of trying to obey the Law, perhaps the answer lies in eliminating sin. Enter the Catholic Church—their solution was that THEY claimed the authority to forgive sin. It was a clever approach to a serious issue that has plagued all of mankind. And it seemed to work (at least in their minds) until one man came along who disagreed that the Catholic Church had that right. That man was Martin Luther. However, his opposition to the Catholic doctrines meant that righteousness was once again unattainable because of sin.

But Martin Luther was also a clever man. He came up with a new 'solution'—eliminate the Law! As Scripture says, "without the Law sin *was* dead" (Rom. 7:8) so if the Law is abolished then it is impossible to sin. If sin does not exist then suddenly everyone is righteous! While he did not say these things in so many words, it is effectively the message in his treatise, *Two Kinds of Righteousness* written in 1519AD. But how did he eliminate the Law? Contrary to the Catholic doctrine that they could forgive sin, he believed that forgiveness was through the sacrifice of Christ. However, he still did not want to have to abide by the Law. Instead, he selectively used Scripture to say that all can achieve a state of righteousness if they simply have "faith in Christ." He gave to the world the solution that solved everything: a righteousness **without** the Law. The only requirement was a person had to proclaim their faith in Jesus Christ. Henceforth the Protestants call it "the Law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

To someone who knows nothing about the Protestants that statement would be very confusing. They overlook the fact that the phrase clearly includes the Law AND Christ, who not only upheld it but refused to abolish a single 'jot or tittle'. So, they teach that Christ somehow kept the Law *by His sacrifice* on behalf of mankind so salvation is only

through *faith* in His sacrifice. Their problem is they do not understand His sacrifice was for sin, which exists BECAUSE of the Law. So, they wander about thinking that the Law is no longer important.

Given this, one might understand why the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees tried so hard to enforce the letter of the Law even though they established loopholes in it so they could satisfy their lust for sin. It never occurred to them to actually abolish the Law as did the Protestants. In fact, the foundation for this false salvation is grounded in Romans chapter 10 (among others):

ROMANS 10:4-6, 9-11 For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. 5 For **Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law**, That the man which doeth those things **shall live by them**. 6 But **the righteousness which is of faith** speaketh on this wise, ... 9 That **if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved**. 10 For with the **heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation**. 11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

In particular, they love verse four which says, “**Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth**.” But does that say that Christ put an end to the Law? If so, that would contradict Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:17-18. So, either Paul was the ‘first’ Protestant or “end of the law” does not mean the Law is eliminated. Obviously, the latter is the case because the Protestants ignore verse 3 which says Israel had “not submitted themselves unto the **righteousness of God**.” What is that? It is the result of forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ BUT it still requires obedience to the Law. In fact, Paul mentioned this well before chapter 10:

ROMANS 3:26-28, 30-31 Through the forbearance of God; yes, to publicly declare **His [God's] righteousness** in the present time, that He might be just, and **the one [God] Who justifies [makes righteous] the one who is of the faith of Jesus**. 27 Therefore, where *is* boasting? It is excluded. Through what law? *The law* of works? By no means! Rather, *it is* through a **law of faith**. 28 Consequently, we reckon that **a man is justified [made righteous] by faith**, separate from works of law. ... 30 Since *it is* indeed **one God Who will justify [make righteous] the circumcision by faith**, and *the* uncircumcision through faith. 31 **Are we, then, abolishing law through faith? MAY IT NEVER BE! Rather, we are establishing law.**

Sadly, it seems that many in the *ekklesia* have an altogether different solution to attain righteousness—ignore the Law by staying ignorant of all the statutes, precepts, testimonies, and judgments. Are we, today, exempt from knowing these things? Can we ignore laws because they “do not apply”? Who determines that? When Christ came to “fulfill” the Law did He not emphasize the critical spiritual motive of agape love to ‘fill

up' the Law? It says in Hebrews 7:12, "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a **change** also of the law." It says some of the Law *changed* but was never eliminated. Are we not to be kings and *priests* in God's Temple? Read Revelation 3:12 and 7:15. Obeying the Law requires knowing it—all of it.

The Jews, Catholics, and Protestants all tried to find alternatives to keeping the Law because everyone understands salvation requires righteousness. The *ekklesia* of God understand the Law still applies and it is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins that God imputes His righteousness to us. If we must obey God's Law, then we absolutely need to know it. The Feast of Tabernacles is rapidly approaching and it is a time that the Law was read to all of Israel (Deut. 31:9-13). It is a good reminder to be studying it. Ignorance of the Law may, in fact, result in God imputing SIN instead:

ROMANS 4:7-8 *Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed *is* the man to whom **the Lord will not impute sin.**

So, having God's righteousness imputed to us requires knowing the Law:

ROMANS 4:22-24 And therefore it was imputed to him [*Abraham*] for righteousness. 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24 **But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed**, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

Brethren, do not be ignorant as have many throughout the ages when it comes to the Law of God. We are obligated to study, know, and understand all of it:

ROMANS 10:3-4 For they being **ignorant of God's righteousness [the perfect keeping of the Law]**, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. 4 For **Christ is the end [result, purpose] of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.**

Christ did not put an 'end' to the Law, His sacrifice was the RESULT of sin and for the PURPOSE of imputing God's righteousness. Salvation it is to those who not only keep His Law but repent unto forgiveness when they fall short. Repentance only happens when we are aware of sin and sin requires knowing the Law of God.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

<https://sabbathreflections.org>
sabbathreflections@gmail.com