

Priests or Profanity

Drash on parashah 32; Emor

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He may not make himself unclean, because he is a leader among his people; doing so would profane him. Cohanim are not to make bald spots on their heads, mar the edges of their beards or cut gashes in their flesh. Rather, they are to be holy for their God and not profane the name of their God. For they are the ones who present Adonai with offerings made by fire, the bread of their God; therefore they must be holy.
[Vayikra/Leviticus 21:4-6]

Throughout the past two thousand years of church history, the Adversary has used a clever trick to imprison God's people. He has imprisoned Believers in a cage that has the appearance of freedom and gospel truth, yet limits citizens of God's Kingdom by telling them what they can't do, don't have to do, or shouldn't do, rather than what they can do and ought to do according to God's Word. What is the name of that cage? Grace.

What do I mean by that? We are told over and over that a person must rely on grace to be saved because as a human, it is impossible to be holy. To transgress one aspect of the law is to break it all, so why even bother with any of it? Just rely on grace, because after all Yeshua did it all for you anyway. To try to venture out of the "freedom" of grace is to put oneself in further bondage. This is what we are taught from the pulpit, but is it what is taught from Torah? I don't think so.

For certain individuals, the ones written about long ago as being meant for this condemnation, have wormed their way in – ungodly people who pervert God's grace into a license for debauchery and disown our only Master and Lord, Yeshua the Messiah. [Jude 1:4]

We see the cohanim in this week's parashah commanded to be holy. Elsewhere, all of Israel is commanded to be holy as God is holy. Why would God command something He knows to be impossible? Part of the problem stems from our understanding of holiness. I said a few weeks ago that holiness was hitting the bullseye every time. In my studies since then, I've changed my thinking on that a bit. I think that holiness comes from perfectly following Torah. Notice that within Torah there are instructions, lots of them, concerning repentance, atonement, and seeking forgiveness and restitution from God and our fellow man when we have wronged either one. In other words, built within the framework of Torah is the ability to make mistakes, as long as proper steps, dictated by Torah, to repent from sin and restore relationships are made. It is like a machine that fixes itself when it breaks. This is how David could commit adultery and murder and still be a man after God's own heart. He sinned, but then continued in the ways of Torah by fixing the mistakes he made.

I think we have been deceived into thinking that grace frees us, while Torah binds us. As we read through Tehellim/Psalm 119, David doesn't seem to see Torah as a prison.

I will go wherever I like, for I have sought your precepts. [Tehellim/Psalms 119:45]

This is one of 176 verses, the longest chapter in the Bible, virtually all of which express David's love for Torah. Holiness is not necessarily hitting the mark every time, but continuing to shoot at the target, always striving to hit that bullseye, and do it as often as possible. This shows God our devotion to Him, and it is His grace and the power of His Spirit which enables us to do it. Grace does not free us from the law, but frees us from sin, so we can continue striving in the law.

I think, as God's people, we are much more capable of doing what is right than we are taught. Let's go back to the context of the parashah. This is not written to common people. It is not even written to the ordinary Israelite, but to the cohanim. However, though the cohanim were chosen by God to be specially anointed to serve in His tabernacle, they were still human just like you and me. They were required to be holy in order to serve God, and this was before the life and death of Messiah Yeshua. The fact that most of these priests did not drop dead the moment they set foot in the tabernacle, tells me they were able to achieve the state of holiness God required. What's more is though the Levites held a particular role and office in Israel, in a broader sense, they were not the only priests in and outside of Israel.

Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohenim for me, a nation set apart.' [Sh'mot/Exodus 19:5-6]

These are two verses most of us are well familiar with, but rarely do we see them together. All of Israel we to be cohenim, in that they were to be a unique treasure amongst the gentiles so that, as we see later in Yesha'yahu/Isaiah, the Temple could be a house of prayer for all nations. A priest was simply a spiritual leader, and apart from the unique role of cohen at the tabernacle, anyone could be a spiritual leader within the particular role and place God had put them in. A mother is a cohen to her children. Children are cohenim to their younger siblings and their friends. Whether at work, home, school, at the store, or just walking down the street, we are called spiritual leaders to those God puts under our authority just as He did to the cohenim in the tabernacle. This is what being a light and living in the light is all about.

But you are a chosen people, the King's cohanim, a holy nation, a people for God to possess! Why? In order for you to declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [1 Kefa/Peter 2:9]

How are we to live in the light if we are living like the world? If all we do is sit in grace and never do anything to live out our faith, then how is the world going to see the light of Yeshua. He said that the world would hate us because of Him. All too often the world hates Him because of us!

In our parashah, the priests were taught to be holy in order to keep from profaning the name of God. As spiritual leaders, they represented God to the people. A line from one of my favorite Christian songs says, "The only Jesus they will ever see is the one in you and

me." He is the Living Torah, so what better way to show others Yeshua, than by living out the Written Torah in our lives? Not only that, but the Hebrew word for profane is "chala" which means to bore or wound. Isn't it interesting that Yeshua was wounded for our transgressions by ungodly people because of the testimony of God's own cohenim. If I live my life in an ungodly way, I can seek forgiveness and receive it, but often I will have no idea how my actions profaned the name of God to others, thus causing them to put nails in the hands of my Messiah!

Now I know that *all have sinned and come short of earning God's praise.* [Romans 3:23] However, God knows that and Torah knows that, which, again is why the sacrificial system and other such methods for atonement are in Torah. Also, this why there is such a thing as grace. It is not to make us feel like we can do nothing so why bother trying, but to give us something to catch us when we fall off the tightrope of Torah, so we can keep learning how to live in God's Kingdom. This is also why we have been given the Holy Spirit.

Those who obey his commands remain united with him and he with them. Here is how we know that he remains united with us: by the Spirit whom he gave us. [1Yochanan/John 3:24]

In a few weeks we will be celebrating Shavuot, in which we will be learning more the correlation between the giving of the Torah and the giving of the Holy Spirit. Here and elsewhere, we see a progression of faith. We begin with obeying the commands of God, which unites us with Yeshua. While united with Him, our sins are forgiven through the work on the cross, then we are filled with the Holy Spirit, who confirms our union with Messiah by empowering us to do that which God has called us to do according to Torah. Certainly there are specific revelations the Spirit gives us individually to show us God's will, but in order to know it is the Spirit guiding us, everything must match up with Torah. This is how we *test the spirits to see whether they are from God* [1 Yochanan/John 4:1] It is through Torah, that we even know what sin is and that Yeshua is the Messiah. This is why the priests were chastised by Yeshua, because if they truly knew Torah the way they claimed, they would know who He was!

For if you really believed Moshe, you would believe me; because it was about me that he wrote.

But if you don't believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" [Yochanan/John 5:46-47]

In order for this to work, however, we have to have a proper understanding of Torah. It is not a list of do's and don't's that we check off to make ourselves feel better, or to think that through them we have a right relationship with God. Torah is not law, but teaching. Torah teaches us how to aim at the target, it is not the target itself, which is God. If we are to live in the Kingdom, we have to learn how to live in the Kingdom. I am in no way negating Sha'ul's teaching about being saved by grace and not by works, but we have to realize that grace is not just a New Covenant concept. The Abrahamic Covenant is a covenant of grace. It was the people who were already part of that covenant who God gave his Torah to. He did not give it to a pagan nation, telling them, if you follow these laws, you will be saved. Torah taught God's people how to live as God's people. Yeshua didn't just

tell His talmidim to trust in Him and His works. He told them to follow Him, and instructed and empowered them to do the same thing He did. He taught them with the same Torah and prophets we have today. He resisted the Adversary with the same Word of God, we have today. The same Spirit that he healed and performed other signs is the same Spirit His talmidim used to do the same things, and which we can use today.

Anyone who unites himself with Yeshua automatically becomes a priest, with Yeshua as the High Priest.

We have this hope as a sure and safe anchor for ourselves, a hope that goes right on through to what is inside the parokhet, where a forerunner has entered on our behalf, namely, Yeshua, who has become a cohen gadol forever, to be compared with Malki-Tzedek. [Messianic Jews/Hebrews 6:19-20]

Malki-Tzedek king of Shalem brought out bread and wine. He was cohen of El `Elyon [God Most High], [B'reshet/Genesis 14:18]

Malki-Tzedek was a priest-king of God, who was not part of Israel. This is the priesthood that Yeshua is compared with, rather than the Aaronic priesthood. As priests of Yeshua, we are called to be holy. We are called to go into the world to make students of Torah (talmidim) of all people, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can only do this and become the people God desires for us to be through union with Yeshua, but according to the teachings of Torah. Within this union, all things are possible. Grace ought to encourage us in our pursuit of Torah, unafraid of failure, but enabled by the One who is there to pick us up and help us continue to walk in the footsteps of Torah. In doing this, we learn how to worship God and bring honor to Him. To do nothing, or to live our own way only serves to profane God's name, when we should be proclaiming His name in all the earth as His priests.

"Human being, tell her this: 'You are a land that is neither cleansed nor rained on in the day of fury. There is a conspiracy of prophets in it like a roaring lion tearing up the prey; they have devoured people, seized wealth and valuables, and widowed many in it. Her cohanim have done violence to my Torah, profaned my holy things, made no difference between the holy and the common, not distinguished between unclean and clean, hidden their eyes from my shabbats, and profaned me among themselves. Her leaders in it are like wolves tearing up the prey to shed blood and destroy people, in order to benefit unjustly. Her prophets have "plastered" for them with whitewash, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, "Thus says Adonai Elohim," when Adonai has not spoken. The people of the land have extorted, robbed, wronged the poor and needy and unjustly oppressed foreigners. " 'I sought for a man among them who could build a barricade or stand in the break to oppose me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I am pouring out my fury on them, consuming them with the fire of my rage, bringing their own ways on their own heads,' says Adonai Elohim." [Yezekh'el/Ezekiel 22:24-31]

All God needs is one worthy priest, and He can save an entire nation. Priest or profanity, the choice is ours.