

“The Weightier Matters of The Law”

In the chapter which forms the New Testament portion of our daily readings, we have recorded the Master’s rebuke to the Scribes and Pharisees:

“Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted *the weightier matters of the law, Judgment, Mercy, and Faith*: these ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone” (Mat. 23:23).

In these words, we find that the Scribes and Pharisees, whilst being punctilious in their observance of the smallest detail of the Mosaic Law, nevertheless “omitted” the “weightier” matters, or principles that were also contained within it. Not that they were wrong in giving attention to the required tithes – the Master does say that they were not to leave them “undone”. But rather, in their approach to the Law, they laid burdens upon men which could not be borne, and overlooked the greater principles of salvation, as manifested in Judgment, Mercy and Faith.

Judgment

Proverbs chapter 21, and verse 3 reads:

“To do justice and judgment is *more acceptable* to Yahweh than sacrifice”

The issue of Judgment therefore, being one of the “weightier” matters of the Law, was even more important than the offering up of Sacrifice. Leviticus 19 describes the Judicial aspect of the Mosaic Law:

“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but *in righteousness* shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15; cp Deut 17:11).

These words are clearly to do with judicial administration, i.e. dealing with wrongs between brethren, and the handing down of justice in Israel. No special consideration was to be given to the poor, for the sake of them being poor, and no priority was to be extended to the mighty, for the influence that they might otherwise had. Rather, the issuing forth of justice was to be “in righteousness”.

In these things, we see a foreshadow of Messiah’s reign over his coming kingdom. Isaiah prophesied of this:

“... he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, nether reprove after the hearing of his ears: But *with righteousness* shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” (Isa. 11:3-4).

The sweet Psalmist of Israel also spoke of this time:

“he shall judge thy people *with righteousness*, and thy poor with judgment” (Psa. 72:2)

Those officials who handed down judgments in Moses’ day therefore, were actually dispensing Divine justice, in that their manner of ruling was to form a pattern for the future world-wide rule of Messiah. But at that time, Messiah will not reign alone. Revelation 20:6 describes how his brethren shall “reign with him a thousand years.” And the Apostle Paul describes how that being co-possessors of the Kingdom, “*the saints shall judge the world*” (1 Cor. 6:2).

There is actually a very important lesson in considering these things: if we, as Messiah’s brethren are to “judge the world” in the future, then we ought to be able to judge between our brethren and sister now in the present dispensation. That is the context to 1 Corinthians 6, as cited above:

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? ... *If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the Ecclesia.* I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

Let us, therefore walk according to our High Calling, and conduct all our relationships with our brethren “in righteousness” that we might become prepared to be judges with Christ when he comes.

Mercy

Although when considering the Law, the aspect of Judgment and the sentencing of a Just Recompense for sin, is often emphasised, the next two principles are not as readily appreciated. Yet *Mercy* and *Faith*, according to Messiah, form 2 thirds of the “weightier matters” of the Law.

Just like the matter of “Judgment” (as cited above), “Mercy” is seen to be more important than the sacrificing of animals, which could never take away sin. So, Hosea prophesied (and was cited by the Master):

“*I desired mercy*, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6; see Mat. 9:13, 12:7).

However, when we come to consider the teaching of the Law regarding Mercy, we find that the emphasis is mostly to do with the Mercy of Yahweh. The implication being, that we ought to show mercy to others, because that Yahweh has shown mercy to us. Consider the following passages:

“Thou, *in thy mercy* hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation” (Ex. 15:13)

“and he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of Yahweh before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, *and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy*” (Ex. 33:19)

“Know therefore that Yahweh thy Elohim, he is Elohim, the faithful El, which *keepeth covenant and mercy* with them that love him, and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:9).

In addition to these passages, we learn from the writer to the Hebrews that Mercy was not extended to those who despised the Law:

“He that despised Moses’ Law died *without mercy* under two or three witnesses” (Heb. 10:28).

We find then, that involved with this aspect of Mercy under the Law, is the implication that only those who respected and sought to follow that Law would have mercy extended to them individually. Those who casually flaunted it, such as a certain man who went out to gather sticks on the Sabbath day (Num. 15), would be condemned by it, “without mercy”.

When we come to consider the dual aspect of “judgment” and “mercy,” we find that there is a balance within these attributes. The Judgment of Yahweh condemned the guilty, and brought a knowledge of sin, whereas the Mercy of Yahweh is associated with deliverance, and the hope of Salvation. There is a point on the scale at which Judgment is executed with no mercy (as in the case of those who “despise” the holy things of Yahweh), and contriwise, there is another point at which Mercy is extended in the place of Judgment. James speaks of this:

“... he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; *and mercy rejoiceth against judgment*” (Jas. 2:13).

This is what our sentence will be at the last. Though Law and Judgment would condemn us to the grave, Mercy rejoiceth against Judgment, and is extended in its place. And notice the practical outworking of these things: Mercy is only extended to the Merciful. Let us therefore, as recipients of the Mercy of Yahweh, learn to extend that same mercy to those around us.

FAITH

The third “weighty” aspect of the Law - Faith - is closely associated with the second. Mercy was part of the Law in the means by which the Father chose to redeem His people, and the extension of salvation to those who would hearken to His Word. Mercy then, is what the Father extends to us. Faith on the other hand, is something to be shown on our part, in response to that Mercy. And Faith, as a justifying principle was intrinsically part of the Law. So we read:

“ ... by the deeds of the Law there shall be no flesh justified in his sight: for by Law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God

without the Law is manifested, *being witnessed by the Law* and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is *by faith* of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all *that believe ...*” (Rom. 3:21-22).

From these words, we learn that the Law itself “witnessed” to the Righteousness of God displayed outside itself. No flesh can be “justified”, or considered righteous as a consequence of obedience to the Law: rather it condemned all who lived under it as sinners. But there is a Righteousness of God extended to men outside of that Law (but testified by that Law), even to those who have faith, and believe in the promises made to the Patriarchs. “that no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith” (Gal. 3:11). The Law itself testified of this principle: that men could be saved through faith in the substance which it foreshadowed. The Law, as a shadow institution, could not perfect those who offered sacrifice under it (Heb. 10:1). However, being a shadow, it provided a silhouette, or outline, of the substance in Christ. Those who lived under it, who had faith in it’s teaching of the Great Sacrifice to come in the offering up of Messiah, could find forgiveness and reconciliation. Whilst “it is not possible that the blood of bull and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4), nevertheless, through the offering up of the body of Christ sins may be forgiven. In that One Great Offering foreshadowed by the Law, those who “were under the first testament ... might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

BLINDNESS

Returning to our Reading in Matthew 23, we saw how that the Scribes and Pharisees could not discern or behold the “weightier matters” of the Law as described above, but nevertheless were stringent in their application of it’s finer details to others. So, the Master rebuked them: “*Ye blind guides*, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” and again, “thou *blind* Pharisee” (Mat. 23:24, 26).

This teaching of Messiah, that the Jewish leaders of his day were “blind” is a consistent one. Earlier in Matthew chapter 15, he is recorded as saying: “Let them alone: *they be blind leaders of the blind*. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Mat. 15:14).

We would do well to heed the example of our Master in our relations to “the blind” of our day. In our times, there is what we might call the “Alternative View” concept, which states that all men can have a legitimate “view” on any given matter. According to this concept, those who teach different ideas to those held by ourselves are simply expressing an “alternative view” to us. However, that concept is not a Bible one. According to Messiah, those who cannot discern the principles of the Spirit are “blind” – and by definition of what a “blind” man is, he can have no “view” at all, for he cannot see a thing. What men call “alternative views”, the Word of Yahweh calls: “damnable heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1). Those who men refer to as simply having “a different viewpoint” are called by the Word of Yahweh: “men of corrupt minds” (1 Tim. 6:5). Though such terms would be frowned upon by the majority in our day, being dismissed as “extreme” and “unloving”, it is a fact that there is no passage of Scripture which states that the Blind can actually see, and have a “view”. On the contrary, for those who supposedly have “another view” of the saving principles of the Gospel, Paul pronounces to be “accursed” (Gal. 1:9). What we teach

is not “our view” on the matter, but rather we seek to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11), and present only those things testified in the Living Word. Men who walk in darkness may content themselves with discussing their supposed “views,” yet ever learning the myriads of men’s opinions, they will never come to a knowledge of the Truth, unless they open their eyes and be guided by the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ.

A DIFFICULTY RESOLVED

A correspondent, writing in defence of the Alternative View concept, seeks to show that whilst Messiah pronounces the Pharisees to be “blind,” in actual fact, they could see, and have a “view”:

“Jesus calls the Pharisees 'blind' (Mat. 15:12-14) but he also taught to do 'whatsoever they bid you' because they sit in 'Moses's seat' (Mat. 23:2-3).
So it is clear that the 'blind' can have worthwhile views.”

Here is a most interesting specimen of human reasoning: the end conclusion being the exact opposite to the plain teaching of Christ, resulting in an oxymoronic state of confusion. That “the *blind* can have worthwhile *views*” is not taught anywhere in Scripture, and the absurdity of such a statement can be seen on its face. But what then are we to make of Matthew 23:2-3 alluded to here? In this place, Messiah taught the people concerning the Scribes and Pharisees “all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say and do not” (Mat. 23:3). The Scribes and Pharisees thought themselves to be: “a guide to the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the Law” (Rom. 2:18-20) – but they were hypocritical. Whilst teaching that “a man should not steal”, they stole. Again, whilst saying “a man should not commit adultery”, they committed adultery (Rom. 2:21-23). They recited the words of the Law, yet did not live by them.

One of the places that this passage in Romans is alluding to is Psalm 50. There we read the following:

“Unto the wicked God saith, ***What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenants in thy mouth?*** Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest ***a thief***, then thou consented with him, and hast been partaker with ***adulterers***” (Psa. 50:15-18).

Here we have the situation revealed more fully: the Scribes and Pharisees recited the Law which the ordinary people may not have had ready access to. But they lived after a manner of life that the Law condemned. So, the people were told to do what the Scribes and Pharisees taught (i.e. the recitation of the Law), but not do after their example of disobedience.

The Scribes and Pharisees were “blind” in that they could not see the glory of the Law of Moses, in the manner by which it pointed towards Messiah. So the Apostle expounds elsewhere concerning Israel:

“Their minds *were blinded*: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament” (2 Cor. 3:14)

Seeking to burden the people with the minutiae of the Law, the Scribes and Pharisees were oblivious to the fact that the Law was merely a “shadow” to be done away with in Christ. Being unable to see how the various elements of that shadow outlined the work of Messiah, they were truly blind: they had no spiritual vision, and were unable to discern Christ in the precepts that they taught the people. So, the leaders were, as Messiah aptly described them: “blind leaders of the blind” (Mat. 15:14).

Even though today, we do not live under the yoke of the Mosaic Law, nevertheless the intrinsic principles upon which that Law was founded certainly do apply to ourselves. The Law was a “schoolmaster,” which as part of its weightier matters, taught the principle of justification through faith in Jesus Christ. Whilst it is true, that being “the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus” we are no longer under the schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:24-26), nevertheless there is much that we can learn from it. The three abiding principles of Judgement, Mercy and Faith are principles that together form the basis of our salvation, and the hope we have through the offering up of Christ. Men who are blind will be unable to discern those principles, and how they combine in Messiah, as a threefold cord which is not quickly broken. But those who “continue in prayer, and *watch* in the same with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2), being alert to the things of the Spirit, these will have their faith and confidence rewarded by Messiah when he comes again. Here is the exhortation therefore: let us not be as the Scribes and Pharisees who had a living name, yet were dead (cp Rev. 3:1 with Mat. 23:2), but rather “*be watchful* and strengthen the things which remain”. For the “blind” who delight not in the things of the Spirit, there is only the darkness of oblivion reserved for them, for ever. Only if we open our eyes to behold the wondrous things of The Word, and seek to walk in them, shall it be given to us to rule with Messiah in the age to come. Let us therefore give diligent heed to the teaching of Yahweh’s Word, eschewing the varied opinions of men, that we be found “standing fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil. 1:27).

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