

And you shall love the LORD your God...

Living The Way - walking the Path of the Circumcised Heart

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Hopefully my presentation on 'Life in the Kingdom' excited you and energised your desire to 'seek first the Kingdom'!

In this presentation I hope to challenge you; to see perhaps a little more clearly the reality of this present evil and to reflect on our response to it and for God.

That is, in looking at the second half of the Creed of Jesus, I want to share what I think it means to love God with all our being.

So today, I wish to spend a little time on the second part of Jesus' creed; the action part; the doing part; the obedience part.

To set the scene I want first to briefly address:

- 1) How important was/is the Shema to Israel: and
- 2) What is meant by heart, soul, strength, mind, etc as used in the Shema.

The Shema expresses the core beliefs of the Jewish people; it is the last words on their lips when they die; it is said every day in both the morning and evening.

A famous Rabbi, Rabbi Me'ir emphasised the high prominence of the Shema in his statement, "**that he who lives permanently in Palestine, speaks Hebrew, observes the laws of purity, reads the Shema morning and evening, is certain of the life to come.**"

Deut 11:13-15 gives something of the practical import of the Shema:

*¹³ "And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, **to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,** ¹⁴ he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. ¹⁵ And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and **you shall eat and be full.**"*

Their understanding then is that to follow the Shema mean is to live well and be right with God.

What about this heart, soul, might issue? Or to quote Jesus in Mark 12 when asked "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

*"The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **mind** and with all your **strength.**'"*

It is also important I believe to understand the Hebraic concept of the unity of man. Unlike many Christian understandings that our really the result of Greek thought such as the dichotomous and trichotomous views of man, the Hebrews understood man to be one – that is, the mind; the spirit, the soul and the body is all one not separate parts. Instead the repeating of three terms for the one thing is a common form of Hebraic poetry or parallelism (eg. See Ps 119:1-2 where verse 2 is a repeat of verse 1 except in different terms)

This feature is fairly obvious in the passage from 1 Thessalonians (5:23): "**May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" The emphasis is clearly on the whole person, not on a person composed of three parts.

The Jews used "*pneuma*" in Greek in the same way that they used 'ruach' in Hebrew.

A. *Spirit* (ruach & pneuma) - **Breath of life**. The vital principle by which the **body is animated**.

It is the life force that God gives to people and animals which **animates** their bodies, which gives them life. When He takes it away they **die**.

Examples:

Psalms 104: 29-30: "*When you take away their breath (pneuma), they perish and return to the dust from which they came. When you send forth your breath (pneuma), they are created.*"

Ecclesiastes 12:7: "*And the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the life breath (pneuma) returns to God who gave it.*"

Paul uses spirit and mind interchangeably as he quotes Isaiah 40:13 in the New Testament.

Isaiah 40:13: "*Who has directed the **spirit of the LORD**, or has instructed Him as His counselor?"*

Romans 11:34: "*Who has known the **mind of the Lord**, or who has been His counselor?"*

1 Corinthians 2:16: "*For who has known the **mind of the Lord**, so as to counsel Him?"*

In other words, whoever unites himself with the Lord is one with him in mind, mind-set, attitude, thinking, or in purpose, which are all synonymous. Here are some other examples. Try substituting one of the given definitions where it says "*spirit*" and you will get a clearer meaning of the verse.

Numbers 5:14: "*Or if a man is overcome by a **spirit of jealousy**.*"

Galatians 6:1: "*Even if a person is caught in some transgression, you who are spiritual should correct that one with the **spirit of gentleness**.*"

1 Corinthians 2:12: "*We have not received the **spirit** of the world but the **Spirit** that is from God.*"

Deuteronomy 34:9: "*Now Joshua, son of Nun, was filled with the **spirit of wisdom**.*"

Genesis 41:8: "*Next morning his **spirit** was agitated.*"

Romans 12:2: "*Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the **renewal of your mind**, that you may discern what is the **will of God**.*"

Ephesians 4:23: "*And be **renewed in the spirit** (purpose) of your **minds**.*"

2 Corinthians 4:16: "*Although our outer self is wasting away, our **inner self** (spirit i.e. mind) is being **renewed** day by day.*"

Colossians 3:9-10: "*Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the **new self** (new mind), which is being **renewed**, for knowledge in the image of its creator.*"

Finally, **Psalms 33:6:** "*When his **spirit** (pneuma) departs he returns to his earth; on that day his plans **perish**.*"

Thus when the spirit or breath of life from God is removed a man dies; his mind no longer functions and while his body still exists; it is now dead and begins to decay.

Thus the shema calls us to love the One God, our Father; the Creator of the Universe will ALL that we are!

The computer, this marvellous creation of our times is built on the simplicity of binary – a number system with only a 0 and a 1. Everything on a computer is actually stored as a series of 1's and 0's.

Well God is into simplicity as well with His 2 steps (rather than AA's 12 steps!):

And you shall love the LORD your God...

In following God we are called to:

- 1) know God & live;
- 2) hear (understand) & do;
- 3) seek the KoG & His righteousness;
- 4) love our Messiah and obey his commandments;
- 5) have faith & demonstrate it through action;
- 6) follow the example of our Master who came full of Grace and Truth
- 7) know who God is & then love (i.e. follow) with our ALL (The Creed of Jesus, the Sh'ma)

Most of Yeshua's parables focus on the Kingdom of God. Given that the sharing of the good news of the coming KoG was his mission in life (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:38; 1 Jn 3:8), this is not at all surprising. You might wonder why the Messiah's parables focussed on the Kingdom as worthy and imminent but not so much on what life would be like in the Kingdom?

Perhaps part of the reason for this was that Yeshua was speaking to Israel who knew their TaNaK well and the TaNaK speaks quite clearly of what life will be like in after the resurrection. Much of what is prophesied relates to having abundance provisions and not going hungry. In Australia today we are so blessed that such a prophecy probably holds little excitement for us!

Luke 19 is one of the most insightful of these. Let us read Luke 19:11-27.

¹¹ As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. ¹² He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³ Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' ¹⁴ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' ¹⁵ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. ¹⁶ The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' ¹⁷ And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' ¹⁸ And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' ¹⁹ And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.' ²⁰ Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹ for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' ²² He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' ²⁴ And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' ²⁵ And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' ²⁶ 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ²⁷ But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.' "

Here we learn the story of a nobleman (representing our Messiah) who goes away to a foreign country (representing Heaven), to receive his Kingdom. While away, (representing the last 2000 years), many of his citizens (humanity) do not want to have him or his followers rule over them (representing most of humanity!). The nobleman gives 10 of his followers one mina* each (representing talent and responsibility); to take care of while he is away. As we know so well they achieve various degrees of profit with the funds and are accordingly awarded various degrees of reward in the future kingdom (when the nobleman returns to fully establish his kingdom).

* Adam Clarke (1837) states that a mina was 60 shekels or 9 pound – perhaps around \$1000 in today's terms

Note what happens with his servant who did not make a profit. Not only does he rebuke him (and who amongst us really wants to be rebuked by our Lord and Master); but he takes the one mina from him and gives it to the most successful servant. In other words, he gains no reward at all – the parable does not say he is cast out of the kingdom and clearly he is not included in the citizens who refused to adhere to the authority of the noblemen's followers. These citizens are slain before the nobleman – they are judged, found guilty and cast out of the kingdom and destroyed.

Now consider Luke 17:7-10 and 1 Cor 3: 10-15.

⁷ "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? ⁸ Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'?"

⁹ **Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?**

¹⁰ **So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have only done what was our duty.'** " Luke 17:7-10 (NKJV & NASB have unprofitable rather than unworthy servants)

Here we learn that if all we do is that which is commanded we have been unprofitable, Do you wish to only do what is commanded of you by God or to go further, to be profitable and receive a reward? Now look also at 1 Cor 3:10-15.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

The gold, silver and precious stones don't get burned up but obviously the wood and hay do.

When aligned with the parable of Luke 19 we see that to gain the rewards on offer we need to do more than what is commanded of us.

When we accept Yeshua as our Lord and Saviour, hopefully those who have led us to the Messiah will have taught us something of what it means to be a believer and told us that the Apostle Paul called us to be like him and be "under Christ's law" (1 Cor 9:21) i.e. obeying the commandments of our Messiah – remember this does not make us profitable, only servants and future citizens of the Kingdom.

The apostle John in his first letter also said, referring to Yeshua and our obedience to him:

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:3-4).

John sets up a simple contrast. Those who obey Yeshua's commands have come to know him. Those who claim to know him but do not obey are liars.

Yeshua told us what happens to liars:

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur" (Rev 21:8).

Yeshua himself said to the rich man who asked him what he needed to do to enjoy life in the Coming Age (i.e. eternal life) "...

If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." "Which ones?" the man inquired. Yeshua replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Matt 19:18-19)

And Yeshua even added that this was not enough! In fact Yeshua intensified the Torah.

Note firstly that the core of the Divine Instructions (Torah) given at Sinai are repeated in Gal 5:19-21 *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

In particular in Matt 5:17-19 he makes it very clear he did not come to abolish God's commandments: *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the (Torah) or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the (Torah) until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches (i.e. being profitable) these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Yeshua tells us in Matt 5:17 that he came not to remove or abolish the Torah but to complete it. When he said *'You have heard it said... but I say to you ...'* he is not cancelling the Torah but intensifying or enhancing it.

How is it intensified?

Yeshua is declaring here that it is a heart or mind matter not a legalistic matter.

It is not the 'letter of the law' or outward observance that matters but having a mindset on doing the will of the Father. That is, a mind, a heart, a spirit in tune with God.

Note that in Romans 7:4,6 *So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.*

And *But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the* (legalistic observance of the Torah and Rabbinic) **law** *so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (letter/traditions).*

Here Paul tells us that when we become part of the body of Yeshua, we die to the law. Yet look at Romans 3:31 *"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law"*

How can we die to the 'Law' and yet not nullify, it but uphold it?[†]

[†] David Klinghoffer a Jewish Scholar in his book *"Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History"* addresses the issues of: (1) the apparent contradictions in Jesus' approach to the Torah as well as (2) Jesus' apparent failure to reign as the predicted Messiah is supposed to – "The world sure doesn't look redeemed."

With regard to the first issue, Klinghoffer takes us into the thought-world of the Hebrew Scriptures, and of 1st-century A.D. Judaism. "Let's consider, as a particularly important example, the religious leaders' attitude toward the commandments. They had been warned in Deuteronomy that "you must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God" (4:2), and that you shall observe these commandments "always" (11:1). Now comes Jesus, presenting his listeners with innovative loopholes—didn't David break the Sabbath (Matt. 12:3)?—and appearing to put Himself above the commandments: "The Son of man [Jesus Himself] is lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8). In asserting that the Sabbath is made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27), Jesus indicates that He is in a position of judgment above both man and Sabbath. In the Sermon on the Mount, he espouses an attitude of contrast between the hitherto authoritative teaching of the religious leaders ("You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times . . .") and his own definitive new teaching ("But I say to you . . .")."

When our heart is circumcised (remember that the Hebraic use of the word heart means the centre of our thoughts and understanding) we will act with humility and obedience such that we uphold the intent of the law, not the letter of the law. In fact this poor translation from 'Torah' into 'law' is not at all helpful as it suggests to our Western and Greek mindset a rigid, inflexible, legalistic approach that is severe, and even cruel and lacking compassion and grace! And yet, who is the author of grace; or planned and enabled the greatest act of grace in the history of the world! Who else but the Creator, the so-called 'law-giver' – am I as a father to my children a 'law-giver' when I give them boundaries in which to grow as children; boundaries that protect them; that mould them and help develop their character. If my children love and respect me that will do their best to adhere to my fatherly instructions which may to their un-wise minds appear harsh and unfair at times.

Yahweh wants a loving submission not an outward appearance of submission (perhaps because of the fear of consequences) with an internally uncircumcised heart. We are released from a legalistic observance of the Torah & Rabbinical law.

*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the Torah. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. **Therefore love is the fulfillment of the Torah.** - Romans 13: 8-10*

What is love – faith in action:

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. (The Sh'ma – according to David Stern. James -Jacob or Ya'akov, is perhaps arguing as a Jew to Jews that to believe the Sh'ma is not enough. That is faith without action is not enough)

*Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"— and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ **For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.** James 2:14-26 (ESV)*

True faith MUST result in works.

Consider Acts 15: A conference was held to consider what should be required of the Gentiles in reference to the Mosaic system. Acts 15:5 states that *"Some of the Pharisaic party who had become believers came forward and declared, 'Those Gentiles must be circumcised and told to keep the law of Moses.'"*

To the traditional believers of His time, this must have sounded shocking: Surely the Messiah they were awaiting would not overturn their most cherished religious beliefs? In this context, when Jesus admonished them, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets" (Matt. 5:17), it might have been heard as less than sincere. ... (Excerpt from a review of "Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History" in NATIONAL REVIEW, by Michael Potemra) – this perhaps indicates something on the enormity of this issue – again I recommend Frank Selch's book to better appreciate this issue.

James declared the following in verses 28, 29: *“It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and our decision, to lay no further burden upon you [Gentiles] beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from meat that has been offered to idols, from blood, from anything that has been strangled, and from fornication. If you keep yourselves free from these things you will be doing well.”*

It was obvious that these prohibitions were partly in deference to Jewish followers of Messiah Yeshua.

Remember, that part of loving your neighbour is trying to avoid offending them. If Gentiles, in their freedom were to partake in certain foods or in sexual immorality, this would be a bad witness to their Jewish neighbours.

The standard of conduct for Christian believers given by Yeshua in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5, 6, 7) clearly stated the core beliefs for all believers, whether Jew or Gentile.

Note in 5:48 *“Therefore, be perfect, as your Father in the heavens is perfect.”* Jesus is here repeating what God instructed Abraham to do in Gen 17:1 *“And it came to be when Abram was ninety-nine years old, that Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am El Shaddai – walk before Me and be perfect.”*

(El Shaddai – God Almighty, The God who blesses!)

Surely to ‘be perfect’ means to remove sin from our lives, just as John reiterates in 1 John 3:6-9:

*No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to **destroy the works of the devil.** ⁹*

Just as an aside we see here the mission statement of Jesus from Luke 4:43 and Mark 1:38 stated in a different form – when the KoG is established; upon our Messiah’s return, the works of the devil, the works of sin will be destroyed.

To this point I have tried to establish that we are called to be perfect; to love our neighbour and that if we desire to be profitable servants of our Messiah, we need to do more than just obey his commandments.

So what is more? He commands us to be perfect; to love; to preach the good news of the Kingdom. What can we do that is more – support orphans and widows; help the poor; save the lost from their despair; stand against evil?

Yes, the world was created GOOD but consider the evil that surrounds us.

Dealing with Evil:

Warning: The images I am about to present are far from pleasant (No children under 12). Please view despite the discomfort you may experience; in fact, perhaps because of the discomfort. Images of Evil (Slideshow)

The world is evil; the world is ‘as in the days of Noah’ – a time of great violence; and as in the days of Sodom and Gomorah – a time of great sexual immorality. How are our ‘circumcised hearts’ called to respond?

That is, in walking as Yeshua did, how are we to respond to our world; how are we to behave and are we also to speak out against such evil, as our Messiah most certainly did?

Evil has been with us for a long time now. Holocausts happen. Stalin killed at least four times more than Hitler, Mao Tse-Tung more than Stalin. Wide-scale holocausts have been perpetrated in Cambodia, Uganda, Rwanda, the Sudan and dozens of other countries. What happened under Nazi Germany fifty years ago was not *the only* holocaust, although a very, very significant one. It was *a* holocaust, one in a long and ongoing tradition of holocausts.

The holocaust of the unborn is happening today. It is a holocaust that is hidden from view. Just try to imagine; 70 million surgical abortions p.a. and perhaps as many chemical abortions again. These numbers beggar belief; this is around 190,000 per day and 8,000 per hour. 8,000 during the time I give this speech; over 40 in Queensland today, most of them just down the road in Bowen Hills and Greenslopes. There are now a great many studies that show that these abortions, while doing the greatest harm to the unborn child who is murdered, also do great harm to the mothers who turn their wombs into graveyards; and even to the husbands and boyfriends and families. We are all affected by this much more than we probably realize. The damage can last a life time[‡].

And what makes holocausts like this abortion holocaust work? It is simply that the larger group of citizens does little or nothing to stop them.

After the command to rescue those being led away to slaughter, Proverbs 24 anticipates our excuse for not doing so: *"If you say, 'but we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" (Prov 24:12)*

Cowardice is a sin (Rev 21:8).

I do not for a moment believe that someone is cowardly just because he chooses not to get involved in fighting evil. Life's realities are much more complex than this.

If we look full in the face of Scripture and history and prayerfully and honestly conclude that we can do nothing but pray (eg an elderly believer in Aged Care) when we address this daily holocaust of unborn children then that is one thing. If our conclusion secretly stems from the fear that God would call us to it, and of what that would cost us, then that is another.

If we desire to be profitable servants and ask what can we do to stand for God against evils such as abortion, and to try to save the many thousands and millions of mothers and babies and families that are so terribly hurt by this evil; what are the consequences?

In speaking out don't we risk conflict, ridicule, suffering, jail time, the possible loss of money and possessions. When we consider this are we now afraid?

Mark Belz says of the option of 'rescuing' (non-violent protests by sitting in the doorways of today's gas chambers, the abortion clinics:

"This crossing of a line that is done with such fear and trepidation, and which is criticized and condemned outright by so many Christians, is an act which lends credibility to everything else which we are saying and doing in the pro-life movement". He adds, **'Just as it is essential for each of us to**

[‡] Melinda Tankard Reist's book 'Giving Sorrow Words' describes the lives of around 25 woman in Australia who had abortions. Only 1 or 2 of them, who have since found the Son of God have found ant=y real forgiveness and been able to move forward and eliminate the great pain, etc.

demonstrate solidarity with the unborn, so it is essential for us to demonstrate solidarity with each other."

Nearly four hundred times Scripture tells us not to fear. Our natural tendency is to be afraid to stand up for Christ and for innocent victims. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the determination to obey God despite our fears.

"Are we not all cowards by nature? Are we not all fearful of standing against the tide of this world; standing against the crowd when they practice evil?"

If you now sense the terror and fear within you, you may ask the vital question; how do we stand against evil and with our Messiah? How do we overcome the sin of cowardice?

We must put on the armour of God (Eph 6:13-18). We must seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; we must put our faith and trust in our Father in Heaven; we must lean on our Messiah and Saviour who said '**my yoke is easy and my burden light**' (Matt 11:29-30)

As Jesus states to the religious leaders of his day: "**But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.**" (Matthew 23:23). Jesus was here repeating the pivotal statement in Micah 6:8 "**He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.**"

Are we acting justly and being profitable servants when we neglect or avoid the evil that surrounds us? The evil of abortion or the evil increasingly perpetuated against the Jewish people. Why is it in this age that it seems the Jew is more persecuted than the Christian? Is this because they are a greater light unto the nations than we are, or because they are an easier target given the Christian world's failure to adequately support them?

We must learn from Jesus; we must walk in His ways and we must do so continuously; daily; fervently. Only by being immersed in the love and Spirit of God and His truth may we find the strength and courage to stand with our Messiah and against such evil.

If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him....perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4:12-16,18 NKJV)

You might like to interject at this stage and state that this present evil age is built on a wrong, faulty foundation. It cannot stand. It cannot be fixed! No amount of activism on anyone's part can save or ultimately and permanently change it. Instead, it will be totally torn down and replaced with the coming Kingdom—the kingdom government—of Yahweh, which the Messiah will bring at His Second Coming.

You would of course be correct!

But, does this mean we therefore do not need to alert the world to the evils about us such as abortion or anti-semitism or sexual immortality or to the plight of the poor and needy? Does this mean we should not try to save innocent children from being murdered in the womb; in what was designed by our God as the most secure and perfect place for them?

Should we do no more than announce the good news of the Kingdom of God?

Certainly, to think we can change the world or that God calls us to is clearly wrong. However, like the man walking on the beach throwing the starfish back into the sea; (relate this parable if needed) surely we can make a difference to some and in so doing be a light to the world and bring others into the kingdom by our example, and perhaps in this way be profitable servants?

Consider these scriptures:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Gal. 6:9-10)

Aren't we failing our family in not speaking out to our brothers and sisters?

If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:16-17)

*"The LORD said . . . 'Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. . . . by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. . . . **If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech . . . I will set my face against that man and his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him . . .**'" (Leviticus 20:1-5)*

Note the addressing of individuals here – not just the government or leaders but individuals and their families are held responsible.

The horror is that so many in the community of God; in our churches today, are culpable in the murder of the unborn, partly through ignorance and lack of clear teaching of truth.

*"Do **this so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land**, which the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance, and so that you will not be guilty of bloodshed." (Deuteronomy 19:10)*

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, **so that we can comfort those in any trouble** with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)*

*"**Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.**" (Psalm 82:3-4)*

*"**Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.**" (Proverbs 31:8-9)*

"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." (James 4:17)

***Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter.** If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? (Proverbs 24: 11-12)*

When we look more closely at the Hebrew Bible scriptures quoted above and others like them we see that many may be addressed to the leaders or judges of Israel; that is to God's leaders in a nation founded by God. Perhaps then they need not be applicable to us in this present age?

We may say we should mind our own business and vice versa – many Europeans during the 2nd World War believed the Jew-killing was none of their business. You probably know well the story of the church beside the railway line that carried many of these Jews to their deaths? (Repeat if unknown.)

Many Americans in the 1800's thought slave-holding was none of their business. Many Christians in India thought they should ignore the infanticide and 'sati' (wife-burning) that the Hindu's practiced. In case you weren't aware a man now called 'The Father of Mission' one William Carey was the man most responsible for ending the shocking practices of infanticide and wife-burning that occurred in India. Carey was a man who believed in social activism, even in civil disobedience where he thought it could be effective in doing God's work.

Yet we know him today as a great and leading example of evangelism. He preached the gospel but he did much more besides. Carey demonstrated the good Samaritan principle in action – he loved his neighbours; his community in his adopted country India.

Also consider William Wilberforce without whose political efforts, slavery may have lasted much longer in the England.

To quote Wilberforce:

There is a principle above everything that is political; and when I reflect on the command which says 'Thou shalt do no murder,' believing the authority to be divine, how can I dare to set up any reasonings of my own against it? And Sir, when we think in terms of eternity, and of the future consequences of all human conduct, what is there in this life that should make any man contradict the dictates of his conscience, the principles of justice, the laws of religion, and of God?'

Note his actions were based on his consideration of the KoG.

I declare my greatest cause of difference with the democrats is their laying, or causing the people to lay, so great a stress on the concerns of this world as to occupy their whole minds and hearts, and reserve a few scanty and lukewarm thoughts for the heavenly treasure.

Note his appreciation of the importance of the KoG. He also understood we are called to be faithful not necessarily successful.⁵

'Act from a pure principle, and leave the event to God.'

Do we fulfil our responsibility to the poor by just not stealing their food or to the unborn by just not killing them ourselves? I would suggest that this is not enough. God says to us as 'third parties' not directly involved in these actions:

⁵ Some other well known evangelistically oriented Christians:

John Wesley actively opposed slavery, and encouraged mine workers to unite in order to resist the inhuman treatment by their employers. Evangelist Charles Finney had a major role in the illegal Underground Railroad, saving the lives of many blacks, while under criticism from fellow Christians because of his civil disobedience. His college, Oberlin college, became a major stop on the underground railroad. **D. L. Moody** opened homes for underprivileged girls, rescuing them from hopelessness and exploitation. **Charles Spurgeon** built seventeen homes to help care for elderly women, and a large school for hundreds of children. Spurgeon and his church built homes for orphans in London, rescuing them from starvation and vice on the streets. **Amy Carmichael** intervened for the sexually exploited girls of India, rescuing them from temple prostitution. She built them homes, a school and a hospital.

O house of David, this is what the LORD says:

*"Administer justice every morning;
rescue from the hand of his oppressor
the one who has been robbed,
or my wrath will break out and burn like fire
because of the evil you have done— (James 4:17)
burn with no one to quench it. (Jer 21:12)*

Note here that **we** are evil if we don't rescue the innocent!!

You may argue that this consequence is addressed only to God's firstborn and we believers in Yeshua having been grafted into the cultivated Olive Tree are not equally responsible?

Yet if we are grafted in aren't we then part of Israel and haven't we seen that Yeshua has intensified the Torah not removed it; yes, Yeshua has freed us from bondage to ceremonial and rigid legalistic ordinances but he has not freed our hearts from the Father.

As we grow in love for the Father and His only begotten Son, surely our hearts will grow more in-tune with Yahweh's.

Yahweh HATES the shedding of innocent blood – should we stand by and ignore it or pretend it does not matter.

There are many examples in the Bible of men and women who were third parties to evil, yet acted in the will of God in getting involved. For example, Jehosheba who took Joash and hid him so he would not be killed.

Abortion is different from most sins – it is the innocent baby who makes it different. After an abortion the mother can be healed but the baby can't. The death of the baby is final and irreversible for this most innocent one.

Yes, it is true that in the case of pregnancy, the mother has a divinely given responsibility, but I can find no scripture that therefore absolves us of our responsibility to her (in saving her from the consequences of participating in murder), but more significantly our responsibility to "**Rescue those being led away to death**", that is the unborn child.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come . . . take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . . I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. 'Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. . . . 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'" (Matthew 25:31-46)

I suggest you consider Yeshua's words here in terms of the innocent babe being carried to his/her death – 'I was thirsty' or 'I was being led to slaughter' (from Prov 24)

What about Luke 10:27 *"... love your neighbour as yourself."*

As I have already intimated; Love is something you do; love is action, love is commitment. The Great Commission is not called the greatest commandment. Loving God and loving your neighbour is.

How do we love our neighbours – surely trying to save them from slaughter and self harm (within limits of course) is part of that?

God tells us we cannot plead ignorance. We know who the unborn are, and we know (or could if we chose to) how, when and where they are being killed here in Brisbane. Today and tomorrow!

That society's values have come to a place where child-killing has been legalized and accepted, is hard to believe. That the Christian Church by and large has chosen to ignore this incredible violence in our own backyard is even more so. That statistics suggest that at least 20% of our 'born-again' Christian women sitting in our churches have had abortions is staggeringly hard to comprehend. This also suggests that there is a very large portion of Christian men who are also culpable or even more guilty in this evil.

That they need to experience the amazing forgiveness and mercy of Yeshua if they have not repented and accepted His Way, His Truth and His Life is beyond question.

Of even greater concern perhaps are those who have had abortions after accepting Yeshua as their Lord and Saviour. Perhaps the church and particularly her preachers, have really failed them in allowing them to remain in such ignorance of God's way, by not speaking out God's word on the sanctity of human life.

If we have circumcised hearts and have submitted our lives to Yeshua we now live under a new promise, a better promise but also a more demanding one.

Freedom from rigidity, from legalism **but not freedom from caring**; not freedom from loving with the Father's heart His most innocent of those created in His image.

There are though many other evils in the world and many other needs. We are called to care for widows and orphans; to support the poor and needy; we are called to exercise discernment amongst our brethren and exclude from fellowship those involved in sexual immorality (1 Cor 5)

*I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is **sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler**. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." (1 Cor 5:11–13)*

Now given that it is God, not believers, who is to judge unbelievers should we do anything at all to address the evils we see in this present evil age?

Look at Acts 17:16-17

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was **reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day** with those who happened to be present.

If we take Paul's example, we are called to try to reason with the world; to educate them; to speak to anyone who will listen.

There are clearly very many issues to speak out against and Yahweh gives each of us different gifts and callings so that we may focus on different aspects and evils as we act as a 'light' for our Lord. [remember, **our faith is evidenced by our works**].

So do we all need to speak out against abortion? Paul calls us to flee sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:18); to flee idolatry (1 Cor 10:14); to flee false doctrines & the love of money (1 Tim 6); to flee wickedness & the evil desire of youth (2 Tim 2:19-22).

There are many evils to avoid and speak out against. The poet and theologian John Donne said:

The greatest gift of God, I would think, is the gift of life;

The greatest sin of man, it would seem, is to return that gift ungrateful and unopened.

The killing and murder of the most innocent who have no voice of their own is surely a sin of the greatest violence. God destroyed all people except Noah's family because the earth was filled with violence.

Gen 6:12-14 *God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, **for the earth is filled with violence because of them.** I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.*

This surely shows the seriousness of this issue!

I believe that regardless of our gifts and passions, we all need to be educated on this issue and investigate ways to contribute in the alerting of this world to this great evil. There are very many ways in which we can all play a part – silence is the one action that we must avoid.

I believe that the sanctity of life is so fundamental to God's nature that our attitude to this issue could be thought of as a 'litmus test' of our faith. Someone can be strongly pro-life and not a believer – I have known some who fit this category and was one myself once; but I do not think that someone can be a mature Christian and not be pro-life.

A would like to read a quote from Royce Dunn, Director of the USA's Life Chain organisation: *"Adult America equates terrorism with brutal beheadings and heartless bombings perpetrated by radical Islamists; but if tens of millions of our fellow citizens could speak to us, with their questioning eyes piercing our hard hearts, they would recall fellow Americans who mercilessly suctioned, dismembered, tore, cut, crushed, burned, and starved them to death, while no institution in their culture defended them with serious resolve. Instead denial ruled the day. Denial by millions of Americans who advocate abortion but would never say they support the killing of preborn boys and girls. Denial by a citizenry who esteem America for her civility when in fact, notwithstanding our Judeo-Christian heritage, America now ranks among the earth's most violent nations. And denial by an institutional Church that claims to be pro-life but has yielded much of its heart and integrity to self-indicting rhetoric, passivity, and hypocrisy. Anti-Nazi leader and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted that no civil law compels the Church to defend the innocent and helpless, but God's moral law surely does.*

Please examine your own heart before God on this matter.

As the Body of Messiah we are not all mouths or all ears or all hands etc. Our Creator has given us all distinct and unique talents to use in His service. Whatever your heart's response, your actions will be most effective for God and most profitable when they exercise the gifts your Creator has endowed you with.

Conclusion:

Yeshua calls each of us to walk the narrow path as we best see fit; but our best is only acceptable when our heart and mind are turned to God; when we continually seek the instructions God has given us in His Holy Scriptures and continue to commune with Him through prayer and worship.

When we do this; we will still make mistakes and, at times, take steps down the path away from our God; but the moment we sense our error we will repent and turn back because, as Yeshua said '*Repent for the Kingdom of God is near*'. (Mark 1:14-15)

May we all be found worthy and **even profitable** at the return of our Messiah to take part in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and to enter into the life in the Coming Age.

Paul Herring July 2008

References:

'*Torah: Mosaic Law or Divine Instructions?*' By Frank Selch – presently available through my website;

www.charismacomputers.com.au

'*Christians and the Law (Torah)*' By Charles Hunting

Appendix:

1) The apparent hypocrisy of the Apostle Paul:

Upon his visit to Jerusalem in Acts 21 Paul was confronted with a slanderous twisting of his teachings. He was told "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe, and they are all zealous for the Torah; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs." (Acts 21:20-21)

In order to prove that this was nothing more than slander, Paul takes the nazirite vow and goes to make offerings (sacrifices) at the Temple (Acts 21:22-26 & Num. 6:13-21) demonstrating that he himself kept the Torah (Acts 21:24). Paul did and said many things to prove that he both kept and taught the Torah.

He:

- circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:1-3)
"Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." Note the reason.
- took the nazirite vow (Acts 18:18; 21:17-26)
- taught and observed the Jewish holy days such as:
 - Passover (Acts 20:6; 1Cor. 5:6-8; 11:17-34)
 - Shavuot (Pentecost) (Acts 20:16; 1Cor. 16:8)
 - fasting on the Day of Atonement -Yom Kippur (Acts 27:9)
- and even performed animal sacrifices in the Temple (Acts 21:17-26/Num. 6:13-21; Acts 24:17-18)

Among his more notable statements on the subject are:

- "Neither against the Jewish Torah, nor against the Temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all." (Acts 25:8)
- "I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers." (Acts 28:17)
- "...the Torah is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good." (Rom. 7:12)
- "Do we then nullify the Torah through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we maintain the Torah." (Rom. 3:31).

And yet in the following scriptures he may appear to be contradicting his Torah observance:

Gal 5:1-6, *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, **but faith working through love.** ... For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*

Romans 2:25-27 *For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?*

Romans 2:28-29 *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*

So has Paul contradicted his words by his Torah observant actions?

No, he has at all times exhibited love – he has loved his Jewish neighbours and not offended them, even at great cost to himself and despite his freedom from the letter of the law. Paul's meekness; his humility; his obedience and his respect for his fellow Jews is a full expression of his circumcised heart.

While *physical* circumcision was absolutely required of Jew and Gentile within the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:9-14), Yeshua, speaking through Paul, made it clear that circumcision is now to be understood in a non-physical, spiritual sense — of the heart, internally and not externally.

Paul says,

"Remember then your former condition, Gentiles as you were by birth, and 'the uncircumcised' as you are called by those who call themselves 'the circumcised' because of a physical rite. You were at that time excluded from the community of Israel, strangers to God's covenants and the promises that go with them. Yours was a world without hope and without God. Once you were far off, but now you are in union with Christ Jesus through the shedding of Christ's blood. For he is our peace; the one making the both one; destroying the enmity in his flesh and the dividing wall which separates -, putting an end (to) the law of commandments in dogmatics; in order to create in himself one out of two into one (brand-) new man – making peace. And reconciling both in one body to God through the cross putting to death the enmity. (Eph. 2:11-18)

Note: Eph 2:15 should read *"And enmity (by his flesh and the Torah, because of commands in his commandments) he abolished...."*. The enmity or hostility/separation spoken of here is that between Jew and Gentile and is present because of the flesh (circumcision vs uncircumcision – the physical difference) and Torah (obedience to God's commands versus ignorance of God's commands – the difference in actions).

For He is our peace, who has made both one, and having broken down the partition of the barrier, having abolished in His flesh the enmity^h – the Torah of the commands in dogma – so as to create in Himself one renewed man from the two, thus making peace, and to completely restore to favour both of them unto Elohim in one body through the stake, having destroyed the enmity by it.

(h = The enmity has been done away with – not the commands of Yahweh! (Eph 2:14-16) The Scriptures 1998)

Thus it is the enmity or separation that is abolished NOT the Torah.

The Temple veil was torn apart and access to God was no longer gained through the Levitical system but through God's resurrected Son and the New Covenant teachings which he ratified with his death. *"This cup is the New Covenant sealed by my blood"* (Luke 22:20).

Consider the question of being estranged from "God's covenants and the promises that go with them." These covenants and promises had been made to Israel through Abraham, Moses and David. A major component of the Mosaic system was of course the priesthood given to Levi. Hebrews 8:6 is enlightening: *"But in fact the ministry which Yeshua has been given is superior to theirs [the Levites], for he is the mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises."* There are two different covenants^{**}, two different ministries involved – one instituted by God through Moses and a different one by the same God through Yeshua.

The latter says, *"The time has arrived; the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). The command to believe and obey the Gospel is quite clear, readily understandable, and available to the entire world. It is accessible to all in its simplicity, unhindered by any set of circumstances, legislative, geographic, or otherwise.

It is a matter of the mind not a matter of physical ordinances.

The rite of circumcision best illustrates the enormous change. Circumcision has not been abolished!

But the physical is no longer required. It has given way to the spiritual. **We must still all be circumcised in our hearts.** *"The real Jew is one who is inwardly a Jew, and his circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; he receives his commendation not from men but from God"* (Rom. 2:29).

Here, one of the lynch pins of the Old Covenant requirements is finished, but it has retained its meaning in a fulfilled sense. The Old Testament was, as in so many other cases, a shadow of the substance of the Messiah who has now come. Shadows fail, but the full intention of the command remains. This is explained well in Col 2:11 – 3:17 ending with: (verses 5-17) *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: whoring, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and greed of gain, which is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of Elohim is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked when you lived in them. But now, also put off all these: displeasure, wrath, evil, blasphemy, filthy talk from your mouth. Do not lie to each other, since you have put off the old man with his practices, and have put on the new one who is renewed in knowledge according to the likeness of Him who created him, where there is not Greek and 'Jew', circumcised and uncircumcised, foreigner, Scythian, slave, free, but Messiah is all, and in all. Therefore, as chosen ones of Elohim, set-apart and beloved, put on compassion, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving each other if anyone has a complaint against another, indeed, as Messiah forgave you so also should you. But above all these *put on* love, which is a bond of the perfection. And let the peace of Elohim rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one Body, and be filled with thanks. Let the Word of Messiah dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing with pleasure in your hearts to the Master in psalms and songs of praise and spiritual songs. And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the Name of the Master Yeshua, giving thanks to Elohim the Father through Him.*

^{**} Jews who reject Yeshua (i.e. Judaism) as their Messiah are separated from God – their hearts remain hard – they remain in the testing of the wilderness (the woman of Rev 12).

But you Christians, have you come to Mt. Sinai for your instructions? *"No, you have come to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to myriads of angels, to the full concourse and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all...and to Yeshua the mediator of a new covenant...See that you do not refuse to hear the voice that speaks"* (Heb 12:22-25).

[Why Mt Zion – refer to Psalm 2:6^{††} – nacak – God will pour out a libation on his Holy Mountain.]

Paul writes about some persistent points of division and disagreement in the Christian church in Romans 14. His inspiration is "the law of concern" for fellow man. The issue is special days of worship and what we may or may not eat.

On the question of varying opinions as to food he concludes, *"Let us therefore cease judging one another, but rather make up our minds to place no stumbling block in a fellow Christian's way. All that I know of the Lord Yeshua convinces me that nothing is impure in itself; only, if anyone considers something impure, then for him it is impure. If your fellow Christian is outraged by what you eat, then you are no longer guided by love. (Note again his respect for and love of his neighbour – his desire to offend no-one.) Do not let your eating be the ruin of one for whom Christ died. You must not let what you think good be brought into dispute; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but justice, peace and love, inspired by the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 14:13- 17).

When Paul makes the statement in verse 20, "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. *Everything is pure in itself,*" one must assume that the writer's use of the word *everything* refers to food, not poison or nails! i.e there are still some sensible limits in our freedom.

In Paul's statement we find no support for enforcing Mosaic food laws. The Apostle recognized that a major problem is created if we require converts to Yeshua from the Gentile world to alter their diet by submitting to Moses. This would be to miss the point of the new international faith, *"for the kingdom of God is not in eating and drinking, but justice, peace and joy inspired by the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 14:17).^{††}

The change from Old Covenant requirements to the New Covenant is radical and dramatic. "Thou shalt not kill" is heightened to "love your enemies." And we are to set out on the ultimate quest for eternal life in the age to come: *"Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness"* (Matt. 6:33).

The New Covenant demands a love toward God the Creator and His Son Yeshua who gave his life in sacrifice for our sins under a New Covenant. Yeshua said, *"If you love me keep my commandments."* We enter rest by faith and obedience.

Heb 4:8-9 *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest^k for the people of God;* (k The Greek word is *sabattismos*, which simply means *Sabbath-keeping!*)

The writer of Hebrews is quite clear about the two different time frames. In chapters one and two he points to the exalted position given to Yeshua now and in the age to come. Hebrews 2:5: *"For it is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come [the coming New Age] which is our theme."* And the **subjection of this earth** to man is yet future: *"You put everything in subjection beneath his feet. For in subjecting everything to him, God left nothing that is made to be subject. But in fact we do not yet see everything in subjection to man"* (Heb 2:8).

So how pivotal is call to obedience in The Sermon on the Mount?

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is primarily focused on our own heart attitude to God. In this sermon, Yeshua told us to be:

1. 'poor in Spirit" (humility – putting God first & fearing God Prov 3:34),

Isaiah 66:2

"For My hand made all these things,

Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD

"But to this one I will look,

To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word

Isaiah 57:15

For thus says the (high and exalted One

^{††} See article on Ps 2:6 on my website

^{††} From Explanatory Notes (p 1216) in The Scriptures: *"Much of the Torah involves commands, laws, right-rulings, statutes, etc., which relate to a properly constituted society, such as that which prevailed under Mosheh (Moses) or under the sovereigns of Yisra'Al (Israel). As such, laws which clearly apply within a civil or national context are not to be misapplied by individuals living in a society that is not totally subject to the Torah as its constitution and legal code. Thus for example, you may not decide to stone someone to death for desecrating the sabbath. The decision would have to be made by a judge within the framework of such a Torah-based nation. Clearly then, although these laws are still applicable, since the context in which they are to be applied is lacking at present, they can only be applied when such a Torah-true nation comes into existence (for example, when Messiah returns to set up his Kingdom⁸)."*

Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
"I dwell on a high and holy place,
And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly
And to revive the heart of the contrite.

2. 'Mourners' – those who cry out for the righteousness of God; for the inauguration of the Kingdom of God

Isaiah 61:2

To proclaim the favourable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,

Isaiah 66:10

"Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her;
Be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her,

Isaiah 66:13

"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you;
And you will be comforted in Jerusalem."

3. 'Meek' – not pushy, demanding and aggressive but gentle and accepting, (see Col 2: 12-15)
4. 'Pure in heart' – not easily led astray by our lusts,
5. 'Peacemakers' – make the effort to heal rifts; to empathise & restore relationships,
6. 'Salt' – add righteous preservative to a sinful world by our actions,
7. 'Light' – our God-honouring actions are so much a part of us that they shine out for all to see – our faith is evidenced by our 'works' (James 2:18)
8. 'Prayerful' – continue to seek relationship with God and His direction in our lives
9. 'Care for our enemies' – help, support and encourage those who are not our brothers & sisters in the Lord Yeshua
10. 'Be righteous' – obedience to 'Christ's laws' (1 Cor 9:21) in all our actions
11. 'Resist not evil' – accept the persecution we receive from unbelievers and not fight back ...?,

The first five of these clearly relate to attitudes of the heart – while they all involve some form of action and relationship; the first five would seem very difficult to undertake from a legalistic attitude where a person's heart was not fully in synch. The rest are active approaches that it may be possible to undertake without a 'right heart' but generally would be much more difficult for a rebellious heart.

So to conclude this section, I hope I have established with some conviction that we are called to have a '**circumcised heart**', which is, of course, what is entailed in the two greatest commands that Yeshua described.

The Apostle John sums this up in his first epistle (1 John 2:3-6 *The Scriptures*) *And by this we know that we know Him, if we guard His commands. The one who says, "I know Him," and does not guard His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever guards His Word, truly the love of Elohim has been perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. The one who says he stays in Him ought himself also to walk, even as He walked.*

or as the NIV puts it: *We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: **Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.***