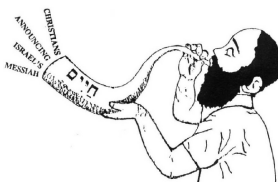


CHAIM TIMES

The Newsletter of CHAIM, "CHristians Announcing Israel's Messiah"

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Ceremonial Law and New Covenant Faith

Being in Jewish ministry, we have been contacted numerous times by people who are disturbed by their fellow Christian family members insisting on keeping ceremonial laws such as the kosher dietary laws. It has disrupted households and has caused conflicts. The movement insisting on keeping the Ceremonial Law is insidious and dangerous because it calls sin what is not sin and misses the deeper meaning of the Ceremonial Law. It is borderline heresy. We thought it important to devote a whole newsletter to this issue. We hope this article will be of service to God's people.

It is crystal clear that "by observing the Law no one will be justified" and "if righteousness could be gained through the Law, Messiah died for nothing!" (Galatians 2:16 & 21). Just as Abraham was justified by faith, so also through faith in Jesus we can be justified. "But now a righteousness from God, apart from Law, has been made known, to which the Law and the prophets testify" (Romans 3:21). Trying to observe the Law will save absolutely no one. But what about after salvation? We know we are saved apart from the Law, but don't we follow the Law now out of obedience and love? I'll answer this both yes and no.

What about the external practice of the Levitical Ceremonial Law today? What is meant by the term Ceremonial Law? Simply the laws associated with the Levitical system of clean and unclean, purification, and atonement. Why do I say "external?" The whole Law is spiritual and has a deeper meaning realized in Messiah. For example, the external rite of circumcision pointed to circumcision of the heart. Both Moses and Jeremiah clearly taught this (Deut. 10:16, Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25). If we miss the deeper spiritual meaning of the ceremonial laws, we miss what is most important. Only observing the externals while not keeping the deeper meaning completely misses the point and in reality is not keeping the Law at all!

Just as external physical circumcision had a deeper spiritual meaning, the same goes for all of the Ceremonial Law. The blood sacrifices for sin point to the sacrifice of Messiah as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The laws of ceremonial washing and clean and unclean food, also have a deeper meaning.

In Hebrews 10:19-22 we find this: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Obviously our hearts are not

physically sprinkled clean. They are spiritually sprinkled clean. Jesus said his word cleanses us: "Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you." (John 15:3) So there is a spiritual cleansing that the rites of ceremonial washing pointed to. Miss that and you miss everything.

What about the dietary laws? Are they health related? It is interesting that there are no dietary laws regarding plants. Nothing can kill you faster than a poisonous mushroom! Both carp and catfish eat the same muck, but one is clean and the other unclean. It is doubtful that this had anything to do with health. Why then is one clean and the other unclean? One is a "complete" fish with fins and scales, and the other lacks scales (Leviticus 11:9-12). You will find unclean animals all are incomplete in some way or related to death. A clean animal had to both chew the cud and part the hoof (Leviticus 11:4-26). If one of the two aspects was missing, it was unclean. Also animals that were close to the earth or predators were unclean. They had close proximity to death. The ultimate uncleanness is death, and the Levitical priests had to stay away from touching the dead.

The whole Law is spiritual and has a deeper meaning realized in Messiah.

The laws of clean and unclean are all connected with the rites of sacrifice and cleansing. In Leviticus 5 if you became unclean, a sacrifice was required to make you clean again: "...if any one touches an unclean thing, whether the carcass of an unclean beast or a carcass of unclean cattle or a carcass of unclean swarming things, and it is hidden from him, and he has become unclean, he shall be guilty... When a man is guilty in any of these, he shall confess the sin he has committed, and he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD for the sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin (Lev. 5:2, 5 & 6).

So the Levitical laws of atonement for guilt—and the associated laws of purity as well—can no longer be observed in their formal particulars today. The Levitical system of cleansing is no longer available. So are all these things completely irrelevant? Not at all. We recognize their deeper spiritual meaning and observe their internal spiritual aspects by faith as they have been brought to a fuller and deeper meaning in Messiah who has brought in the new and superior "Order of Melchizedek" according to Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7:11-18. When we become unclean due to our sins (moral impurity) we can receive our cleansing through Messiah's sacrifice for us.

What do the Levitical rites include? They include the sacrifices

for sin found in Leviticus chapters 1-8 and 16, the rules for the Levitical priesthood found in chapters 9-10, which has been fulfilled and replaced with the Melchizedek priesthood, and the Laws of ritual purity, including the laws of clean and unclean animals, childbirth, mildew, skin diseases, and discharges.

We can't really follow these laws today since they are associated with a priesthood and Temple no longer in existence. The laws against eating blood were connected with the Levitical sacrificial system, according to chapter 17. There are, however, some "moral" laws in Leviticus found in chapters 18-20, but mixed in with them are some laws which make sense only within the context of the Temple priesthood and some which make sense only for the particular historical, cultural and agricultural setting of the Mosaic economy. Great care must be taken when seeking to apply the principles of these laws today! We must understand the ceremonial aspects of the law as spiritual and pointing to issues of moral and spiritual purity and cleanness.

So are the Levitical laws of clean and unclean really obsolete? Remember, "kosher" means "clean." Has God done away with them, even including dietary (kosher food) laws? As to their externals, in a word, yes. First, because they are part and parcel of the obsolete Levitical order. In addition, there are several passages which could be cited, but let's just consider one. With laser-beam clarity Paul states: "All things indeed are clean" (Romans 14:20).

Make no mistake about the context. Paul is writing to both Jews and Gentiles worshiping together in the Roman congregation where the issue of what food is clean (kosher) has arisen. To say Paul would not have considered pork to be food, as some argue, makes no sense at all in this context. It was certainly food to the Gentiles!

But if all food is now clean, doesn't that mean the law has changed? That is exactly what we are told in Hebrews.

"For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well...In speaking of a New Covenant, he makes the first one **obsolete**. And what is becoming **obsolete** and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 7:12; 8:13).

So since there has been a change in the priesthood there has also indeed been a change in the Law, a change due to it coming into a deeper realization, it coming into its true meaning, and the coming of the greater reality of what it symbolized rather than the symbol itself. The old Levitical system of clean and unclean, purification, and sacrifice is now obsolete. It was a shadow of a greater reality.

The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 made it clear that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised. Circumcision was the *sine qua non* of the Ceremonial Law. Things like dietary laws are secondary to that most important rite that made the most basic of all distinction between Jew and Gentile. The Acts 15 council clearly decided circumcision was not required of gentile believers. They were to abstain from certain things their Jewish brothers would find particularly odious though, such as eating strangled animals, eating blood, and eating animals sacrificed to idols, and sexual immorality. (Later Paul even lifted the prohibition against eating animals sacrificed to idols, unless that was explicitly noted and it would cause a weaker brother to stumble. See 1 Corinthians chapter 8.) Paul told the Galatians: "...if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you" (Galatians 5:2). **If the most central and significant ceremonial practice is no longer required, why would ceremonial laws of lesser significance be required?**

Finally, we need to understand the scriptures in their redemptive-

historical context. Gal 3:24-25 tells us: "...the law was our **tutor** to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, **we are no longer under a tutor.**" The Law functioned within a distinct redemptive-historical context and needs to be understood in that light. It was for the childhood of God's people, not their adulthood.

Considering all this, is there such a thing as New Covenant Kosher? Yes, and New Covenant Kosher is simultaneously easier and harder than Levitical Kosher! The intent of the heart comes into play. Though all food is clean/kosher, we must take into account what may stumble another (Romans 14:21) and remember that in all we do, including what we eat, it must be done to the glory of Messiah (1 Corinthians 10:31). This is our kashrut, to glorify Messiah in all we do, and this is not an easy thing! Certainly we are free to keep any kind of dietary practices we want, according to what may help further our witness, our health, and what suits our tastes, but there is no requirement for anyone to keep Levitical Kosher. If your family members are Orthodox Jews, you might decide to keep a kosher kitchen so that they will eat at your home, but 80% of Jews do not keep kosher. The externals of the kosher laws are obsolete as far as obeying God is concerned. That is clear in Hebrews and Galatians, as well in other places in the New Covenant.

So is the whole Law of Moses irrelevant to our practice today? Of course not. On the positive side, all the moral commandments of the Torah are still relevant for us. God's nature does not change and His moral laws are still our guide today. We are to keep the heart of the Law. We are to "love the LORD your God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength" and "love your neighbor as yourself." We have the Ten Commandments, and beyond them we have examples, explanations, and applications of how they were to be obeyed. Also, the civil laws of the Bible give us insight into how we are to govern ourselves, but again, they must be understood in their redemptive-historical context and how they too point to Messiah. The civil penalty of "hanging on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23) was an application of the curse. Jesus was hung on the tree to remove the curse and achieve our blessing (Galatians 3:13-14). Even the civil law had spiritual implications and we must interpret and apply it accordingly. (But that is beyond the scope of this article!)

The Law is relevant for all believers today, but it must be understood and applied in terms of the completed revelation of God in the New Covenant, how Jesus and the Apostles understood and applied the Law, and in light of the fullness of redemption Messiah has brought through the cross. Requiring what God does not require and calling something sin that God does not call sin is a very serious error! If eating pork or shrimp is a sin, then those who eat those things would be sinning, and continuing in sin brings one under congregational discipline and ultimately excommunication. But eating pork and shrimp is absolutely not sin at all. In Jewish ministry circles, and beyond, this error is spreading and must be strongly opposed.

CHAIM Ministry Updates

There is no room left in this edition! Pray for the Rock of Israel church plant, our two home fellowship groups (One Russian and one English), English classes through participating with the local GROW program, ongoing street evangelism, keeping up with Jewish friends, and planning for evangelism this summer.