

The Commands of Yeshua ~ Part 14

Character ~ Part D

"Instead, clothe yourselves with the Lord Yeshua the Messiah; and don't waste your time thinking about how to provide for the sinful desires of your old nature." (Romans 13:14)

In my last post, we looked at His command to "judge not" and "freely give." In this post, we will conclude this mini-series by looking at His command to "be perfect," "don't be a hypocrite," and "to have integrity."

7. Be Perfect

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)

This command has to be the toughest one for any of us to fulfill. As a matter of fact, without the help of the Ruach it is impossible. Personally, I am convinced that if we ever do approach achieving it, He will take us home immediately. This comes at the end of one of Yeshua's most notable teaching - the Sermon on the Mount. In this chapter Yeshua covers a lot of ground. He speaks of the character and nature that He looks for in His followers, that they be humble, meek, merciful, peacemakers, and willing to turn the other cheek in the midst of adversity.

The word translated "perfect" is *teleiōs*, a word that can also be translated "mature" or "full-grown." As followers of Yeshua Christ, how can we be perfect?

- *In character.* In this life we cannot be flawless, but we can aspire to be as much like Christ as possible.
- *In holiness.* Like the P'rushim, we are to separate ourselves from the world's sinful values. Unlike the P'rushim, we are to devote ourselves to God's desires rather than our own and carry His love and mercy into the world.
- *In maturity.* We can't achieve Messiah-like character and holy living all at once, but we must grow toward maturity and wholeness. Just as we expect different behavior from a baby, a child, a teenager, and an adult, so God expects different behavior from us, depending on our stage of spiritual development.
- *In love.* We can seek to love others as completely as God loves us. ¹

In short, to be perfect is to have the same type of relationship with God and before God as Yeshua had. The only way to achieve perfection in the eyes of God is to have a heart that truly, unashamedly, passionately, and wholly seeks after Him.

Application: Are you presenting God with something that you have *done* rather than being the person He wants you to *be* in your heart? If so, repent and ask Him for forgiveness. Take care of your heart before you present Him your activity. Ask His Spirit to guide you into a mature relationship with your heavenly Father.

8. Don't Be a Hypocrite

"Whenever you pray, don't be like the hypocrites." (Matthew 6:5)

"Now when you fast, don't go around looking miserable, like the hypocrites." (Matthew 6:16)

Here Yeshua points out not just the hypocrisy of the religious leaders but all those who had bought into their pious and misdirected religious activity that was for show rather than for God. In His rebuke, Yeshua affirms the need for prayer and its benefits. Likewise, Yeshua affirms the practice of fasting or the denial of food for

¹ Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

the sake of seeking God. Both were legitimate and valuable activities that were being misused and abused by those who should have known better.

Both prayer and fasting were meant to draw oneself closer to God, but the religious hypocrites were using it as a means of drawing attention to themselves - not God's attention, but people's attention. What they did was for show.

Both prayer and fasting were designed to help individuals come to the place where their lives were right before God, and in this state God would be able to speak with them and give them the guidance they sought. Yeshua admonishes us to use our time in prayer and fasting as a private, focused activity, free from distractions, where one's heart and mind can be clearly centered on God for extended periods of time. When we truly seek God first, He then is able to reward us with the very thing the hypocrites were seeking all along. ***"Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*** (Matthew 6:18)

When our Father rewards us openly, we are to give God all the glory.

Application: When you pray in public the question is to whom are you addressing when you pray? If your words are meant to impress those around you, then they do not impress God. If your prayers flow out of your intimate relationship with God, others will be moved in their spirit to agree with you in their hearts. Prayer is meant to interact with God, not to manipulate or impress those around you.

9. Don't Swear an Oath - Have Integrity

"Again, you have heard that our fathers were told, 'Do not break your oath,' and 'Keep your vows to Adonai.' But I tell you not to swear at all - not 'by heaven,' because it is God's throne; not 'by the earth,' because it is his footstool; and not 'by Yerushalayim,' because it is the city of the Great King. And don't swear by your head, because you can't make a single hair white or black. Just let your 'Yes' be a simple 'Yes,' and your 'No' a simple 'No'; anything more than this has its origin in evil." (Matthew 5:33-37)

The point of this command is to be a person of your word. We should never need to ask God to strike us dead, to swear by the heavens, or "as God is my witness," or swear on our "mother's grave," or on the "head of my saintly aunt" when making a promise, none of which makes any sense in the first place. Our daily lives need to be lived in such a way that our character and reputation is a good enough bond. Anyone who needs to swear by things they have no control over has a problem with their character.

This command reflects the contemporary phrase, *"My word is my bond,"* which means *"my word is my guarantee or pledge,"* and that should be good enough. Others may need contracts or written guarantees, but those who deal with Believers should be able to count on them at all times to fulfill their obligations and that which was promised.

Application: Do you know what your reputation is? Are you trustworthy? Do people count on you to come through for them? Are you a person of your word? If not, you are not representing Yeshua very well, and you are giving Believers a bad name. People are watching you, and you are either building up the name of Yeshua in being faithful and trustworthy, or you are bringing disgrace on His name by being negligent and of poor character. Let your word be worth gold.

In my next post, we will begin a new mini-series on the character traits that Yeshua expects us to possess concerning others.