

The Eternal Torah ~ Part 5

Sitting at the Feet of Yeshua

We continue our quest to explore what I have been calling the Eternal Torah. In this post, will begin to take a closer look at what Yeshua himself says about the second and third of six important topics contained in the Torah ~ adultery and divorce.

Do Not Commit Adultery

"You have heard that our fathers were told: 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that a man who even looks at a woman with the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28)

The Torah is crystal clear: ***"Do not commit adultery"*** (Sh'mot 20:14). So serious a view did the Jewish teachers take of adultery that the guilty parties were stoned to death (Vayikra 20:10). Once again, Yeshua states that not only the forbidden action, but also the forbidden thought is guilty in the sight of God. Remember President Carter's admission of lusting in his heart?

Yeshua affirmed God's law of purity, and then explained that the intent of this law was to reveal the sanctity of sex and the sinfulness of the human heart. God created and protects sex. He has the authority to regulate it and to punish those who rebel against His laws. He does not regulate sex because He wants to rob us, but rather, because He wants to bless us. Whenever God says, **"No"** it is that He might later say, **"Yes."**

Sexual impurity begins in the desires of the heart. The desire and the deed are not identical, but spiritually speaking they are equivalent. The "look" that Yeshua mentioned was not a casual glance, but a constant stare *with the purpose of lusting*. It is possible for a man to glance at a beautiful woman and know that she is beautiful, but not lust after her. There is an extremely fine line, however, between admiring God's creative beauty and lusting in your heart. The man Yeshua described looked at the woman *for the purpose of feeding his inner sensual appetites* as a substitute for the act. It was not accidental; it was planned.

In a tempting world there are many things that are deliberately designed to excite desire. Have you seen the Victoria Secret ads on TV or some of the "made for TV smut?" Not much left to the imagination there. Shout, I remember when you never even saw your favorite TV family even mention going to the restroom, let alone showing it. The person whom Yeshua here condemns is the one who deliberately uses their eyes to stimulate their desires. To the pure, all things are pure. But the person whose heart is defiled can look at any scene and find something in it to titillate and excite the wrong desire.

The Lord is interested in what comes out of the heart (Matthew 12:34, 15:16-20; James 4:1-6). Sin is born as we entertain sinful desires in our hearts (James 1:13-15; Galatians 6:7,8). We're not to join in with the trend of this world (James 4:4). We should cleanse ourselves daily with the Word of God (John 15:3).

"If your right eye makes you sin, gouge it out and throw it away! Better that you should lose one part of you than have your whole body thrown into Gei-Hinnom. And If your right hand makes you sin, cut it off and throw it away! Better that you should lose one part of you than have your whole body thrown Gei-Hinnom." (Matthew 5:29-30)

Of course, the words of Yeshua are not to be taken with a crude literalism. What they mean is that anything that helps to seduce us to sin is to be ruthlessly rooted out of life. If there is a habit that can be a seduction to evil, if there is an association that can be the cause of wrongdoing, if there is a pleasure that could turn out to be our ruin, then that thing must be surgically excised from our life.

The eye and the hand are usually the two "culprits" when it comes to sexual sins, so they must be disciplined. Yeshua said, ***"Deal immediately and decisively with sin! Don't taper off - cut off!"*** Spiritual surgery is more important than physical surgery, for the sins of the body can lead to eternal judgment.

Coming as it does immediately after the passage which deals with forbidden thoughts and desires, this passage compels us to ask: How shall we free ourselves from these unclean desires and defiling thoughts? How do we get victory, especially in our current culture? By purifying the desires of our heart and disciplining the actions of our bodies. It is the fact of experience that thoughts and pictures come unbidden into our minds, and it is the hardest thing on earth to shut the door to them.

There are only two ways to defeat these forbidden thoughts:

1. The best way to defeat such thoughts is to do something constructive, to fill life so full with Messianic labor and service that there is no time for these thoughts to enter in; to think so much of others that in the end we entirely forget ourselves; to rid ourselves of a diseased and morbid introspection by concentrating not on ourselves but on other people. The real cure for evil thoughts is good action.
2. The second way is to fill the mind with good thoughts. There is a famous scene in Peter Pan. Peter is in the children's bedroom; they have seen him fly; and they wish to fly too. They have tried it from the floor and they have tried it from the beds and the result has been utter failure. "How do you do it?" John asked. And Peter answered: "You just think lovely, wonderful thoughts and they lift you up in the air." The only way to defeat evil thoughts is to begin to think positive thoughts.

Divorce

"It was said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a get.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of fornication, makes her an adulteress; and that anyone who marries a divorcee commits adultery." (Matthew 5:31-32)

Like many people who "argue religion" the P'rushim were not interested in discovering truth. They were interested only in defending themselves and what they believed. This was why they later asked Yeshua about the Jewish law of divorce recorded in D'varim. ***"Suppose a man marries a woman and consummates the marriage but later finds her displeasing, because he has found her offensive in some respect. He writes her a divorce document, gives it to her and sends her away from his house. She leaves his house, goes and becomes another man's wife; but the second husband dislikes her and writes her a get, gives it to her and sends her away from his house; or the second husband whom she married dies. In such a case her first husband, who sent her away, may not take her again as his wife, because she is now defiled. It would be detestable to Adonai, and you are not to bring about sin in the land Adonai your God is giving you as your inheritance"*** (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

David Stern's translation makes it clear that Moshe gave *only one commandment*: The divorced wife could not return to her first husband if the second husband put her away. *Moshe did not command divorce*; He permitted it. He commanded that the husband give his ex-wife a legal bill of divorcement – a *get*. But the wife could not return to her first husband after being remarried and divorced. Yeshua made it clear that Moshe was only giving *permission* for divorce.

But what did Moshe mean by ***"finds her displeasing?"*** It is the interpretation of this phrase that divided the two schools of Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai, famous first-century Jewish scholars. Hillel took a very lax and now modern view and said that the husband could divorce his wife for almost any reason – even for burning his supper; while Shammai took the stricter view and said Moshe was speaking only about sexual sin. No matter which side Yeshua took, He would surely offend somebody.

The divorce that Moshe permitted in Deuteronomy 24 *actually severed the original marriage relationship*. God permitted the woman to marry again, and her second marriage was not considered adulterous. The second man she married was called a "husband" and not an adulterer. This explains how the woman of Samaria could have had five *husbands*, and yet be living with a man not her husband (John 4:16-18). Apparently all five of those marriages had been legal and scriptural.

This means that scriptural divorce *does* sever the marriage relationship. *Man* cannot break this relationship by his laws, but *God can break it*. The same God who gives the laws that join people together can also give laws to put them asunder. God can do it, but man cannot.

In Matthew 19, Yeshua made it clear that the Mosaic Law of divorce was a concession on God's part. God's original law of marriage left no room for divorce, but that law was laid down before Adam and Eve had sinned. Rather than have two people living together in constant conflict, with one or both of them seeking fulfillment elsewhere and thus commit sin, God permitted divorce. *This divorce included the right to remarriage.*

In reality, Yeshua's teaching here brought new respect for women. The school of Rabbi Hillel's position on divorce was, as now, the prevailing practice – just about any grounds were suitable. Men had many excuses to divorce their wives. Perhaps the most painful for the women was infertility. Here, Yeshua insisted on a different standard. Only the sin of adultery could break the marriage bond, not the lack of an heir or a burnt Matzah.

Remember that Yeshua introduced these teachings by saying, ***"For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"*** (Matthew 5:20)

In my next post, we will continue to unpack the sixth important topics contained in the Torah that Yeshua emphasized in Matthew 5.