

## The Eternal Torah ~ Part 8

### Sitting at the Feet of Yeshua

We continue our quest to explore what I have been calling the Eternal Torah. We've looked at Yeshua's teaching on murder, adultery, divorce, taking of oaths, retaliation & giving. In this post, will finish looking at what Yeshua himself says about the last of six important topics contained in the Torah ~ love your enemy.

#### LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

***"You have heard that our fathers were told, 'Love your neighbor – and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! Then you will become children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun shine on good and bad people alike, and he sends rain to the righteous and the unrighteous alike. What reward do you get if you love only those who love you? Why, even tax-collectors do that! And if you are friendly only to your friends, are you doing anything out of the ordinary? Even the Goyim do that! Therefore, be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*** (Matthew 5:43-48)

There is no other passage of the Brit Hadashah that contains such a concentrated expression of Messiah-like ethics for personal relations.

The Tanakh taught that we should love our neighbor, but nowhere does it say to hate your enemies. Passages such as Sh'mot 23:4-5 indicate just the opposite! Unfortunately, hating your enemies was a man-made regulation. Yeshua defined our enemies as those who curse us, hate us, and exploit us selfishly. Since love is an act of the will, and not simply an emotion, He has the right to command us to love our enemies. After all, He loved us when we were His enemies (see Romans 5:10).

We may show this love by blessing those who curse us, doing good to them, and praying for them. When we pray for our enemies, we find it easier to love them. It takes the "*poison*" out of our heart attitudes.

When we study this passage we must first try to find out what Yeshua was really saying, and what he was demanding of His followers. If we are to try to live this out, we must obviously first of all be quite clear as to what it is asking. What does Yeshua mean by loving our enemies?

Greek is a language that is rich in synonyms; its words often have shades of meaning that English does not possess. In Greek there are four different words for love.

1. There is *storgi* that is the characteristic word for family love. It describes family affection.
2. There is *eros* that describes the love of a man for a maid. There is always passion in eros; and there is always sexuality. As time went on, eros began to be associated with the idea of lust rather than love. It is from eros that we get erotic. **Eros does not appear in the Brit Hadashah at all, nor the Tanakh since that was written in Hebrew.**
3. There is *philia* that describes the warmest and the best - real love and real affection. It is the word of warm and tender affection, the highest kind of love.
4. Finally, there is *agape*. Agape is unconquerable benevolence, invincible goodwill. If we regard a person with agape, it means that no matter what that person does to us, no matter how he treats us, no matter if he insults us or injures us or grieves us, we will never allow any bitterness against him to invade our hearts, but will regard him with that unconquerable benevolence and invincible goodwill which will seek nothing but his highest good. It is *agape* that is used in this passage of Matthew.

Yeshua never asked us to love our enemies in the same way as we love our nearest and dearest. The very word is different; to love our enemies in the same way as we love our nearest and dearest would neither be

possible nor right. This is a different kind of love.

Wherein does the main difference lie? In the case of our nearest and dearest we cannot help loving them; we speak of falling in love; it is something which comes to us quite unsought; it is something which is born of the emotions of the heart. But in the case of our enemies, love is not only something of the heart; it is also something of the will. It is not something, which we cannot help; it is something, which we have to will ourselves into doing.

Agape is the power to love those whom we do not like and who may not like us. In point of fact we can only have agape when Yeshua enables us to conquer our natural tendency to anger and to bitterness and to achieve this invincible goodwill towards all people.

It is then quite obvious that the last thing agape means is that we allow people to do absolutely as they like, and that we leave them quite unchecked. No one would say that a parent really loves his child if he lets the child do as he likes. If we regard a person with invincible goodwill, it will often mean that we must punish him, that we must restrain him, that we must discipline him, that we must protect him against himself. But it will also mean that we do not punish him to satisfy our desire for revenge, but in order to make him a better person.

This commandment is possible only for a Believer. Only the grace of Yeshua, through the indwelling of the Ruach HaKodesh can enable us to have this unconquerable benevolence and this invincible goodwill in our personal relationships with other people. It is only when Messiah lives in our hearts that bitterness will die and agape love spring to life.

It is often said that this world would be perfect if only people would live according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount; but the plain fact is that no one can even begin to live according to these principles without the help of the Ruach HaKodesh. We need the Ruach HaKodesh to enable us to obey the Messiah's command.

Lastly - and perhaps most important of all - we must note that this commandment dictates that we should do something for our enemies. We are commanded to pray for them. No one can pray for another person and still hate him. When we pray for a person that we don't care for, something happens. We cannot continue to hate another person in the presence of God. The surest way of killing bitterness is to pray.

We have seen what Yeshua meant when he commanded us to have this agape love; and now we must go on to see why he demanded that we should have it. Why does Yeshua demand that we have agape love? The reason is very simple and tremendous – agape love makes us like God. Yeshua says that we must have agape love that we may become ***"the children of our Father in heaven."*** In Hebrew, a son of God is the same as saying someone is a godlike man. The reason why we must have this unconquerable benevolence and invincible goodwill is that God has it; and, if we have it, we become nothing less than children of God.

We now have the key to one of the most difficult sentences in the Brit Hadashah, the sentence that concludes Chapter 5. Yeshua said: ***"Therefore, be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*** On the surface, this is an impossible commandment; one, which we cannot possibly fulfill! I don't think that there is one person who reads this post who would even faintly suggest they were perfect.

The Greek word used here for perfect is *teleios*. It has nothing to do with what we might call abstract, philosophical, or metaphysical perfection. An animal offering that is fit for a sacrifice to God, that is a sacrifice without a blemish, is *teleios*. A person who has reached his or her full-grown stature, as compared to a growing child, is *teleios*. A student who has reached a mature knowledge of the subject matter is *teleios*, as compared to a learner who is just beginning.

To put it in another way, the Greek idea of perfection is functional – it's maturity. A thing is perfect if it fully realizes the purpose for which it was planned, designed, and made. We are *teleios* – perfect, mature - when

we realize the purpose for which we were created and sent into the world.

For what purpose were we created? The Bible leaves no doubt as to our purpose. In the beginning, God said, **"Let us make humankind in our image"** (B'resheet 1:26). We were created to be *like* God. We are to take on His characteristic of unconquerable benevolence and invincible goodwill - constantly seeking the highest good for every person. The greatest characteristic of God is love to saint and to sinner alike. No matter what men do to Him, God seeks nothing but their highest good.

It is when we reproduce in our life the unwearied, forgiving, sacrificial benevolence of God that we become *like* God and become perfect or mature. To put it as simple as I can, the person who cares most for others is the most perfect, the most mature of all persons.

We realize our purpose and enter upon Messianic perfection when we learn to forgive as God forgives, and to love as God loves.

My prayer is that as we sit at the feet of Yeshua and learn to be His talmidim; as we continue to take on the characteristics of a Blessed Believer; as we share our influencing faith; as we pursue holy living, may each of us come to know Yeshua more intimately each and every day of our lives.

In my next post, we will continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount by examining Matthew Chapter 6.