

Keeping Kosher
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Editor's note: the following is John's response to a participant on an Internet forum who implied that keeping kosher leads one to holiness. I consider this writing an important treatise on the futility of every type of legalism. Jan Antonsson

Whether our right standing with God depends on keeping the law or upon the life of Christ is a concern which the Council at Jerusalem wrestled with after the birth of the church. Dominated by Jewish believers, the Council, which was totally acculturated to the revealed religion with Torah and the temple at its center, came to the following conclusion as recorded in Acts, Chapter Fifteen:

"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, with the following letter: 'The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell' " (Acts 15:22-29, RSV).

Later, Paul wrote to the Galatians about a conflict he had with Peter regarding dietary laws and customs: "But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles;

but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal. 2:11-14, RSV).

What was going on there? Does anyone seriously think that Peter was party to trying to get the Gentiles to offer sacrifices in the temple and insisting that they make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feasts? I don't think so. What was going on was Peter was eating with the Gentiles according to their customs, evidence that in his private life he was not a fastidious Jew trying to keep all the regulations of the law. He had become a man of the Spirit, but who could still be intimidated by the party of the circumcision.

If the argument is made that Paul is only talking about justification, then one is still locked into the false understanding of justification from the Reformation. Though Luther was right that we are justified by faith, his understanding was part response to the scriptures and part reaction to Rome. Justification became to him merely a legal transaction whereby God attributed righteousness to a man so that he wouldn't go to hell.

Justification means actually making a man righteous through faith in Christ and in that faith union, receiving His Spirit that makes them just, righteous, and holy, from the inside out. "The just shall LIVE by faith" (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Christ in us is a living reality, not a mere forensic edict. God recognizes the real presence of Christ in us as our true personhood and by this we are justified, made just or righteous.

Justification is NOT a forensic act of God; it is the act of a Father sharing His life in His Son with all His sons. That accounts for the weakness of the Reformation Christianity in its own day. It knew very little of the dynamic of the Spirit in every day life. Read William Law to be confronted with a brilliant expose of the futility of mere forensic relationship to God.

History is repeating itself. Jerusalem which is below is in conflict with Jerusalem which is from above (Gal. 4:26). Physical Jerusalem is the place of the rejection of Christ, the place and the system that drags Him outside the gates and crucifies him---and I don't want to hear that egghead nonsense about the fact that the Jews were not responsible for crucifying Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter confronted them with that dastardly deed, saying, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified"" (Acts 2:36, RSV).

Of course, it was according to the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23), and of course we share the responsibility since it was for our sins also that He died, and of course, anti-Semitism is horribly wrong, but they DID crucify the Son of God, and they have this unconscious need to try to make up for it by insisting that they still have a superior approach to righteous living (Rom. 10:2). Give me a break.

If Paul had been a died-in-the-wool, law- observing apostle, he never would have been persecuted by Jews everywhere he went. The Jewish leaders would have easily absorbed the Christian community into its fold; after, all if they could contain such differences as the theology of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they would have had no problem letting this little flock that believed Messiah had come in the person of Jesus coexist with them as long as they didn't make any waves.

If the new community had not taken on the character of being a threat to their whole system they would have lived and let live. The cutting edge of early Christianity struck at central elements of Judaism as in Stephen's apologetic where he boldly declared that God doesn't dwell in temples made with hands. When they were confronted with their infamy in crucifying Christ in the grand tradition of their forefathers who slew the prophets, and then to hear that God no longer presented His presence to the nation and world in their temple but rather in a temple made of living stones---the multiplication of the stone rejected by the builders---then, they went berserk.

The Judaizers insisted that they keep the law of Moses while following Christ (Acts 15:5), but the genuine spirit of recognized

representatives of the Church at Jerusalem was a spirit that kept instruction to a minimum leaving them to live out their faith without cultural interference given the fact that they too had received the Holy Spirit just like the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 8:14-17; 10:34-48).

The following is not addressed to any one in particular. I send it out as a deep conviction from my heart for your consideration. The blatant statement that those who are unwilling to accept the kosher laws as binding upon them are comparatively carnal and lacking a desire to really live pleasing to the Lord is profoundly repugnant to me.

Allow me to foolishly boast of some credentials in the communion of the saints. It has been my privilege to spend considerable time in fellowship with men of such godliness, that to spend time in their presence is to be refreshed spiritually and to be encouraged in the faith. Everyone of them would raise an eyebrow to such an idea and shake their heads in disbelief.

There are two polar opposites that threaten the spiritual life of the church: one comes from heathen impurities added to the faith once delivered to the saints, the kind of things that were added by Constantinian spiritual whoredom, and the other is the externalism of Judaism which stubbornly insists that not only should there remain a place for it, but that it should have a central place in the faith of Yeshua.

I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. I have fought spiritual battles which most in our panel have only heard about. Christ is my life and I owe Him everything. He is my Lord and Savior who daily brings me to the Father and reveals His heart to me. My entire life, with anything of worth, has been a fruit of His grace. "It is my earnest expectation and my hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed but that with all boldness, as always, even so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body whether it be by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20). And now I am called upon to consider that eating pork has been a serious detriment to my spiritual life.

I wonder what else besides Christ in me should claim my attention?

Maybe I should be careful to teach my wife about menstrual uncleanness.

Maybe I need to be on the look-out for any leper coming by so that I'll be careful to treat him in the same way one was commanded to in the Old Testament. Oh Lord, maybe I've been living too simply, too uncomplicatedly. Maybe Christ in us, the hope of glory, is not enough after all.

Never in my life have I read such terrible exposition as what I read concerning First Timothy, Chapter Four: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (I Tim. 4:1-5, RSV).

Verse 3 contains the real danger to spiritual life, and that danger lies in the religious spirit that concerns itself with prohibition and abstinence. It is not hard to recognize Roman Catholicism with its exaltation of the superiority of celibacy and Judaism's abstinence from certain foods. The whole movement of the progressive biblical revelation is a movement AWAY from external symbolism and TOWARD Christ the substance of all the symbols.

Regarding the 10 commandments, the Decalogue: having been confronted by them, and seeing that Christ in His perfection is their fulfillment, I do not see the need to refer back to them since the Fulfiller and Fulfillment lives in me. Torah in general has brought me to Christ and now I'm going on with Him, not looking back.

If I understand what some others are saying---and I know that they essentially believe in the need of grace and the power of the Spirit to lead a holy life. They believe that the Spirit of Christ in some fashion refers us back to the standard of Torah and then offers to help us obey the legal statutes. I'm really mystified on that issue. I'm being honest here. I'm sure that everyone believes that the most important purpose of the law is to "bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24). In the simplest

of terms, that means to me that the law, in effect, takes us by the hand and through type, shadow and symbol coupled with the guilt, frustration and futility that occurs because "It was weak through the flesh," it delivers us to Christ and says, "Now you take over. I've done all I can" (Gal. 3:25).

The fact that Paul doesn't always speak of "the law," using the article, but simply speaks at times of law generically, seems to make the point very well that it was never God's purpose for us to be directed by external legislation in any form, but to be energized by internal impulse. The Hebraic imagery is so beautiful in the story of Eden where the two ways are presented to man, "Knowledge of Good and Evil" (Law) and "Life" (Christ).

God set man up to choose the wrong way to make a point. Then Israel, in this respect, but not only this respect, is chosen by God to nationally flesh out this principle representing the whole of humanity. They told God they would do all that He commanded and of course, they didn't. Over and over and over again they didn't. God is immunizing us to the propensity to say, "Lord just tell us what you want us to do and we'll do it, with Your help of course."

The picture is so clear to me of the "child attendant" (the law) seeing to it that the child gets to school and then leaving him there. At that point the child-attendant has nothing more to offer. The teacher, Christ as the life-giving Spirit, does not commence to instruct the child about the attendant that brought him to school. He commences to impart knowledge to the child. In the case of Christ and us, He imparts Himself, Whom God has made to be wisdom to us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30).

And the standard of that holy life in us is infinitely higher than what can be contained in words written on stone or parchment. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19: 18; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14), just doesn't cut it anymore; now it is "love your enemies and do good to them and pray for them that hate you and despitefully use you." (Matt. 5:44; Lk. 6:35).

When I trace back the meaning of law in its primal sense, I come to God Himself who is a living law unto Himself. He doesn't need to

unroll a scroll each day and be reminded how He should act. What He is, is the essence of the law, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." He has that quality of life. Now "The Father has life in Himself and He gave the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:26). So beautiful, so simple.

The Son lives by the innate goodness of His Father Who dwells in Him and in turn, the Son comes to dwell in us. All the rest of it just goes to prove that, left to ourselves, we will turn a life thing into a religion thing. The law was interposed to make a point, and that is that is that the flesh is weak. Paul's frame of reference regarding righteousness is not the law, but the archetypal dealing of God with Abraham before the giving of the law.

How wonderful that dealing was. God came to a man, just a man, an ordinary man, living in a land famous for the production of idols and said, if I may paraphrase, "Abe, I'm going to bless the socks off you" (Gen. 12:1-3). Absolute sovereign election and grace. Notice, no mention of a sin problem that had to be dealt with first before the relationship could be established, just the overflowing desire of God to bless and go on blessing through the one He blesses. This is righteousness; God acting in the integrity of His love and purpose which action returns to Him as faith which He can and does reckon so.

All law is "weak through the flesh" (Rom. 8:3) whether it be the Noachide Laws or the Mosaic Law or generic law. It just plain fails to accomplish God's purpose in man because that's what it was intended to do; to reveal to man the futility of external religion. And trying to mix law and grace, that is, being mindful of an external demand and trying to make it compatible with "the well of water springing up into eternal life" just doesn't work. Law consciousness arouses the flesh and when the flesh is aroused in the attempt to "do good" it always does the opposite, for "The kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17:20-21).

I have been told that I should emphasize the need for holy living more.

I'll accept that, and simply quote myself in an article I wrote a couple years ago. God does not want our best; He wants His best, Christ in us.

The law brings out the best in man at the outset and then it all goes downhill from there. Spiritual entropy, I guess you'd say. Grace (Christ in us) goes on "from glory to glory." I'm bold enough to tell you, stay away from trying to keep kosher.

Stay tuned for more serious, seminal, samplings

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