

# The Galatians 5:19-21 “Sandwich” – The Works of OUR Flesh



I hope you weren't expecting to feel good about yourself and your "whole Bible" "Torah observant" lifestyle today – but as I didn't spare myself, you can't complain much. I call this section of Scripture the

sandwich where we focus on the bread while ignoring the meat, despite the fact that, in practice, we reject the bread and gobble down the meat – from Galatians 5:19-21

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, (yeah. that's right – death to the perverts, idolaters and drug addicts, ha! those rebellious losers!)

enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy (um... my spidey senses are tingling, must be the enemy trying to steal my peace, time to move on)

drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. (yeah, drunken orgy-goers!)

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (that's right – those sex-crazed crazed, drunken idol worshipers aren't inheriting the Kingdom!)

So we have here what I call the Galatians 5 sandwich, or "the other guy" sandwich. We sure do enjoy calling out the first five and the last two of these – and why? Well, because they

are grotesquely obvious sins that only blatant sinners commit, at least in the open, right? No challenge there – and no one feels bad about themselves (not unless they start looking at other, more socially acceptable addictions or questioning themselves about whether watching sex scenes in movies counts as sexual immorality). But we aren't here to talk about those. We're here to talk about the works of the flesh that people pass off as righteous zeal or don't give much thought to at all. Zeal – remember that word, as it will be important later.

Enmity – the state or feeling of being actively opposed or hostile to someone or something. For example: “enmity between Protestants and Catholics”

Whoa there Nelly! If there is one thing I see in too many of the people around me, it is open hostility to people and/or things. I see people who hate Catholics so much that they would rather die horrible deaths than give Catholics credit for the good works they do – and those poor fools who do dare to give Catholics credit get called papists or worse. I actually did get called a Jesuit spy last week for something silly. I see people hostile beyond logic towards Jews and Protestants as well – to the point where everything and anything about them has to be mindlessly attacked and discredited – even if good, or at worst, harmless. That's enmity, living your life in hostility – it is not a Kingdom principle, and more than that, it compromises our ability to love and grow good fruit. And yes, I am sure that, despite the Scriptural warning, the reason why you are personally doing it is entirely justified. (That, boys and girls, was sarcasm. In fact, my eyes rolled so far out of my head when I said it that I had to call my kids to go look for them)

Strife – angry or bitter disagreement over fundamental issues; conflict. For example: “strife within the community”

Disagreement over fundamental issues is not the problem here, you see, but when it becomes angry and bitter – oh yes, big

problem. This is when we see the insults and cheap shots brought to the table instead of just sticking respectfully and honorably to the facts at hand. Of course, we don't limit our anger and bitterness to the fundamental issues, we get angry over the tiny ones as well, our pet doctrines. Of course, our pet doctrines are never small – in fact, there are no small issues in Scripture, and failure to recognize that means that someone isn't really believing the entire Bible. Right? Right? Maybe not. Strife is founded on and rooted in control issues and fear, which are both contrary to the fruit of peace and self-control. There are things to stand our ground on, but not with bitterness; stands to take in passion, but hateful anger? Very few issues actually warrant anger, and when that anger morphs into hatred among believers? Except for our issues, because they are the most important, and we always have the discernment and maturity to hate wisely, don't we? After all, our track record has been spotless so far.

Jealousy – I am going to risk making you really irritated and point out that the word translated as jealousy is *zelos* – yeah, it looks exactly like the word *zealous* for a reason. In fact, half the time this is translated, it is rendered “zealous.” Zeal is probably one of the most self-deceiving forces on earth and there is a big difference between the Jews coming to Yeshua/Jesus in Acts 21:20, who were zealous for the law that they had grown up with and knew inside and out, and when James and Paul combined that same exact word with selfish ambition (James 3:14) and strife (I Col 3:3). Problem with zeal is that I never met a single person who didn't think their brand of zeal was the righteous kind – you know, like Paul when he was arresting and persecuting believers.

Jealousy, the other way to translate this word, is an ugly thing, it is a blinding thing. Twice in my time as a believer, I have had jealous wives after me – the first time because a choir director became strangely fascinated with me (I know, I mean like look at me – lol, what gives? Who knew that albino

oompa loompas were so alluring?) and the second because – honestly, that was nuts because, to me, the guy was just needy and constantly whining and I don't think that any woman (other than herself) would be attracted to that. I certainly never saw him as anything other than annoying. But jealousy is not a logical thing, it doesn't look at the evidence, it is suspicion and paranoia driven. It happens in personal relationships, yes, and also in any situation where people feel threatened.

Fits of anger – this is the one that applies to me more than any other on the list, boy howdy. Just ask my kids. I am one of those people who just BAM! EXPLOSION. As much as I would like to wage a sarcastic defense of this one, it strikes WAY to close to home for me to even joke about. It isn't funny because I hurt people with it. None of the works of the flesh are funny, and this one gets unleashed against kids, and innocent bystanders on social media way too often, when we launch into knee-jerk accusations and insults over very little, when even a lot should never move us into this area.

Rivalries – competition for the same objective or for superiority in the same field. For example: “commercial rivalry”

This should never even begin to happen in the faith world, but it sure does. I have seen people in ministry go to great lengths to halt the popularity of others, sometimes over disagreements in doctrine but sometimes simply over audience share. Problem with rivalry in religion is that it is never above board – we shouldn't be competing against each other, but cooperating. Rivalry in ministry leads to one thing and one thing only – the creation of personal Kingdoms and Empires. We can't build the Kingdom of Heaven by destroying its Living Stones.

Dissensions – disagreement that leads to discord. This goes beyond just being disagreeable in your disagreement (which is

shameful enough); it morphs ruthlessly into a form of disagreement that ruptures relationships. Honestly, when I look at the relationships being torn apart by flat earth/spherical earth, it definitely qualifies. And for that matter, by archaeologically unsupported stories about Nimrod being responsible for Christmas, leading us to accuse our loved ones of gross idolatry based on theories and “just so” stories (and no, I am not going to publish any Nimrod comments, if that is what you take away from this then – dang.). People who actually agree that the Word became flesh, worked miracles, was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father – the very idea that they are going to be driven apart by a piddly little nothing of a debate about what shape the earth is, it boggles the mind. Shame on us if we can agree on the craziest (and truest) story ever told, without a doubt in our minds, and we are daring to call such brain candy salvational. There is a reason that Paul said, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Cor 2:2).

Divisions – this is what happens when dissensions go too far, and generally is coupled with strife and rivalries. We divide up into little groups that are now created in our own image, which each side firmly believes to actually be God’s image. Got idolatry? Yes, most divisions are entirely pride-based, although we tell ourselves differently. We can’t bear to sit and listen to something we disagree with, not even when we are wrong (not that WE are the wrong ones, oh no, they are wrong, and probably because of rebellion and on purpose, to boot; we are just defending orthodoxy). Oh man, the stupid things that divide us when we agree about so much.

Envy – a feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by someone else’s possessions, qualities, or luck (no, I will not publish any comments about luck being related to Loki, because you know what I mean). Since coming into the ministry four years ago, I see this a lot more than I used to. People

in the body unashamedly announcing their envy of other believer's money, following, children, health, etc. I admit that I myself, being barren, am prone to ugly fits of envy when X is pregnant AGAIN, and when people with healthy, physically sound kids are complaining about things that seem stupid to me as a special needs mom, or when such and such is complaining about the burdens of being pregnant when I got my kids the hard way, through an adoption contested by a rapist that cost us just about everything. Did you see what I did there? I vocalized what is usually **only** in my thoughts, and I did it to show what envy looks like. Should I be mad that some people don't know the heartache of being barren? Do I want them to be barren? Of course not! Do I want other people's kids to be disabled so they can get a taste of my life? Heavens no! And the last one, good grief, no one should have to endure that. I wish I was the only member of that club. You see, envy isn't just about what they have, it's about unconsciously wishing that someone else was privy to our pain. Envy is entirely selfish and often rooted in ingratitude and pain, and yes, it is a work of the flesh because our pain is no excuse.

These aren't on a different list from "the biggies" – they are included as equals on the same exact list. And the people who do them will not inherit the Kingdom of God – you see why I push character over knowledge?

Each of these despicable heart conditions are sandwiched in between the outward, obvious works of the flesh – the sins everyone can see. Coincidence? No way. This is the sandwich Paul described when he talked about how flawless he was in his Torah observance, while inside being a murderer. Paul kept the Feasts, he kept the Sabbath, he tithed, he ate clean, he threw coins at beggars in his gate – and he was a murderous wretch on the inside. No one cared because he was keeping the letter of the Law in the strictest sense on the outside. Paul knew what he was talking about, and what he was doing when he wrote

this. At least Paul wasn't making excuses for himself anymore, so when are we going to stop rewriting the works of our flesh as somehow being virtuous and justified acts of righteousness? I tell you the truth, we have to want to see ourselves as villains before the Spirit can even begin to get a word in edgewise. Until then, we are just fakers keeping a set of rules and patting ourselves on the back for being so obedient – but image bearers? No, that requires integrity inside and out, that requires picking up our Cross and carrying it. It requires pain, and suffering, to be like the very image of the unseen God.

You need to know that, if after reading all that, your response isn't introspective but a “yeah but what about...” then you have completely missed the point that we are all included in this list, and that this sort of list is meant to offend our flesh. It's our choice, however, whether we give voice to that flesh or simply tell it to shut up for once and stop making excuses.

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## [The Dangers of Dualism: Fearing the World Instead of Trusting in God](#)

do we trust God  
**Dualism**  
or fear the world?

Dualism is a metaphysical belief that looks at life in terms of extremes – physical vs spiritual, good vs evil, us vs them, etc. Sounds reasonable at first glance, and yet this kind of thinking has led to a terrible kind of bondage, not

only in the world but also within the Body of Messiah – bondage that we see in politics, congregations, and all over social media. It is an extreme point of view that has led to paranoia, persecution and unnecessary division throughout the ages.

Dualism is about separation, and most often comes up in terms of “we are good, they are bad,” or “physical = bad, spiritual = good.” It’s the mindset behind the idea that this world can be written off, that it exists simply to be escaped from – where we become “more heavenly focused than earthly good.” Because of this, there has grown up a mistrust in and fear of the physical world as well as a fear of and contempt for anyone who is not in lockstep with ourselves – there are no shades of grey in dualistic religious or political thinking. For example, Catholicism (Judaism, Liberalism, Conservatism, whatever) can’t just be partially wrong, in the mind of a true dualist, it has to be entirely evil. It has to be discredit, destroyed, at any cost, through whatever worldly and even sinful means at our disposal. When we are scared, we are more than willing to allow our morals to slip “for a good cause.” Everything done under that banner has to be suspect, and no one can give them credit for any good works for fear of being labeled as a papist, or at least very dangerous. People from other countries can’t just be “backward,” they have to be subhuman – they have to be, because we, ourselves, are supposedly good. Or at least I am, in this train of thought. (Hence the American form of slavery as identified and justified by color). This is also the line of thinking responsible for political rancor, racism, and class warfare – people like me are good and anyone else is suspect and most probably inferior (at the very least)

The Bible even seems to support this kind of thinking, because it was written in a dyadic society – hence they had no problem with celebrating the “dashing of enemy babies against the rocks.” They were too extreme for the tastes of people growing up in a post-Cross world which has been largely transformed by the fruit of the Spirit. We take for granted that no decent person would want such a thing to happen, but again, Yeshua/Jesus died in order to bring God’s heart values (and

not just outward observances, which are also vitally important) into the world in a massive and unprecedented way.

But, with the advent of social media, we have once again become very much like the paranoid and conspiratorial people who lived before the Cross. Nowhere is it better seen than in politics and the fake news stories spreading all over the internet – reporting conspiracies as though they were fact, citing non-existent news stories and fabricating quotes, data and statistics. Of course, these sites have a LOT of advertisements, and they get money when you visit, a lot of money. Because of this unBiblical dualism, which paints everything in terms of black and white, these stories feed the notion that, for example, government is entirely evil, and anyone who questions it is immediately granted an aura of integrity. That's dangerous. We can't attribute virtue to those people who feed our pre-perceived notions and call it something like, "taking the red pill" – instead, it is simply believing, without a thorough investigation, a separate storyline. Believe me, if you take too many red pills, you will overdose.

If you are obsessed with finding all the hidden evil in the world, then your focus is desperately off.

I have seen it used in politics, racism, anti-semitism, intercountry squabbling, religion, you name it. It is rooted in an absolute paranoia of the different. We want "us" to be good and right, and so we need "them" to be evil and wrong. It's completely about us, and because it is about us, our moral compass goes off-kilter. We will believe everything good about us and everything evil, no matter how absurd, about them. It goes so far that we read a story and don't even do a basic fact check – we don't bother to find out if this celebrity actually even made the interview being quoted, or if CNN is actually the source behind a story, or if there truly is a speech on file that says what the story claims, in context. We are driven by fear and surface-appearances by people who, frankly, would appear to be training us to react and divide without even thinking about why we are doing it, and without asking questions. Who exactly is yanking our strings so effectively, while warning us that others are

yanking our strings? Seems to be the perfect disguise for a deceiver, eh?

Think, for a moment, about the paranoia that has to exist within us, in order to believe and propagate anything bad we see reported about our "enemy" when the Ten Commandments specifically tell us not to bear false witness against our neighbors. Think about how compromised we have to be, to forward every bad thing we see about the suspected folks of our choice. That isn't a godly virtue, or truth-seeking, being informed, smarter, a remnant, or a watchman. In the real ancient world – a watchman who reported false information regularly would die. He was not at liberty to blow the shofar every time he saw a tumbleweed on the horizon. What we are dealing with is a lack of self-control – fear gone wild, manifesting itself in sin through false witness. It's a blindness brought on by a need to be good and right – but we aren't entirely good and right – are we?

No. We aren't. And it is our pride and self-deception that drives this madness of external dualism. But let's look at a healthier dualism-ish sort of situation.

Within each individual (let's not bring extremes like psychopaths into the mix), there is a battle of good vs evil. I am certainly no exception – I am trying to be more good all the time and less evil – but the Bible clearly lays out this struggle in every human being, beginning with Adam and Eve. All of the patriarchs, the kings, everyone fought this battle within themselves. We are not entirely good – only one Man could ever boast of that on His resume. The rest of us are various degrees of what I call a hot mess. It is an unending battle that we have to fight every day, for the rest of our lives. As we begin to see how suspect we are, as we stop seeing ourselves and those who side with us as inherently good, we will begin to see the world and the people in it as more multi-faceted. Honestly, that is the kind of mindset that can take the gospel to the ends of the earth – as opposed to Peter's belief that he couldn't even enter the home of a Gentile, even a decade after the Cross. We can't effectively serve God when our judgment and perception is clouded by

extreme dualism.

You know what? The best way to start is to take a break and stop questioning everyone else all the time – the government, religions, races, ethnicities, etc.; we need to question ourselves and what the things we need to/choose to believe – specifically, we need to understand what they tell us about ourselves and our need to believe that we (and those who agree with us) are truly on the unquestionably trustworthy end of our dualistic paranoia.

“Wow, look at that headline, it’s outrageous, and it is about X so it must be true.”

Whether it was happening in Nazi Germany or today, it’s the same dualistic pride and fear behind the sin – and it is behind our inability to do anything but sit in paralyzed fear of the world around us. One thing is for certain – we can’t make any kind of headway in the Kingdom if our constant focus is the world and all the terrible things they must be constantly doing behind the scenes – especially if a lot, or even just a little, of it is just the product of our imagination spurred on by those who are out to make a quick buck, create outrage, and further their own agendas – which we actually should be questioning. After all, if we are so suspicious of X that we will believe anything that Y says, it doesn’t make us particularly well-informed, it just makes us useful to God only knows who, hidden safely and anonymously behind the scenes and hidden behind some computer screen. People we don’t know, but whom we place our blind trust in – simply because they appear to be the enemy of those whom we believe are our enemies.

We are the Body of Messiah: worshippers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Who exactly have we been trusting blindly?

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# Social Media Bullying: Is Saying God and Lord Acceptable?



You're quite fortunate if you run in social media circles within the Hebrew Roots/Messianic movement or other denominations of Christianity and haven't had a run in with people who are quick

to tell you why this or that is pagan, sinful, or just plain wrong. One of the most popular areas in which newcomers are attacked is in the usage of the honorific titles of Lord and God, which are used as English language equivalents to the Hebrew words, Adonai and Elohim. And I am not referring to people who simply prefer to pronounce the Tetragrammaton, I am talking about the people who go out bent on conquering, making it a salvation issue.

Now, it's one thing when seasoned veterans get bombarded with this stuff – but the folks preaching this, often very unkindly and with threats of damnation, do not pay the slightest bit of attention to whether someone has been a believer one hour, or fifty years, or whether they are thirteen years old, or eighty years old. Truly the great evil of social media religious preaching is that we do not have a relationship with the people we are approaching, and therefore have no idea if we even should approach them. We lack the wisdom to know if we are instructing them or confusing them, or even damaging them. I don't want this to happen to anyone's kid and so after years of pondering this, I am finally setting it down in writing.

So, let's look at the use of honorifics in the Bible – and we will use a specific example from my own social media wall a couple of weeks ago. I was talking about it being the anniversary of coming to an understanding of Torah being for today, and I praised “Adonai.” This was the response I got from someone who I had never heard from before:

“Well, I guess you are still waiting for Him to ask you what His proper name is! His name is not Adonai or Lord or God but...”

FYI, I removed His Name from the quote because the sarcastic and ignorant nature of the comment brought His Name to shame. I literally felt embarrassed for my King. Of course, I know the Name, the four letter Tetragrammaton – it was silly, arrogant, and undiscerning to presume otherwise, just because I chose to use a formal title that means “My Lord” or “My Master.”

Before I start, I want to give a little bit of an example of how the usage of intimate Names compares with the usage of honorifics when addressing someone with whom we are not social equals:

Your Majesty,

I applaud your Highness on your recent speech to parliament. It was a privilege to hear the wisdom of your Grace addressing the legislature. Long live the Queen!

Okay, that letter was respectful, right? Let's try it again without the honorifics, but still speaking with nothing but kindness:

Elizabeth Windsor,

I applaud you, Elizabeth, on your recent speech to Parliament. Liz, it was a privilege to hear your wisdom as you addressed the Legislature. I hope you live forever.

Notice that I said nothing uncomplimentary in either letter. But the tone was different – in the first, I was speaking to someone socially way above me and in the second I was either speaking as a peer, a buddy, or a cheeky little monkey. Probably her Majesty would see my impertinence as a qualification for the latter lol. The point is, did I dishonor her in any way by referring to her with honorifics instead of her actual name? Certainly not, if anything, I elevated her – and that is exactly what happens when an honorific title is used instead of the Tetragrammaton or its short form Yah.

So, is there cause to rebuke anyone for using a respectful title? What do we see in the Scriptures? In the Hebrew, and the Greek, do we see the use of titles or only the use of the Name? (I will note here that I have no beef with anyone who pronounces the Name – we see it used all throughout Scripture as well – just not exclusively).

Let's look specifically at Adonai – first used by Abraham in Genesis 15:2 directly to God, and God doesn't get the slightest bit offended and say, "Why aren't you calling me by my Name? Do you want the pagans to think you are talking about someone else?" Nope – why would God take offense to a man submitting himself as a servant? It was a fitting and appropriate thing to do. The prophets thought so too – as Adonai is used 434 times to describe God as Lord and Master.

How about El/Elohim? El is a word that is the Hebrew equivalent of the English God (which came from the Germanic Gott, and is not to be confused with the pagan deity Gad or the Tribe of Gad in the Bible – there is no link between Semitic and Germanic languages – we can't rightly say that the languages were divided at Babel and also say that they are still all related) and shows up within the monikers El Elyon (Most High God) nineteen times in the Psalms, El Olam (Everlasting God) and the more commonly known El Shaddai (commonly rendered Almighty God) throughout Genesis. Elohim is a generic word meaning mighty one or god, and refers to

both the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and various false gods, angels, civic leaders, judges, etc.

Elohim itself is used over 2600 times in the Hebrew Scriptures and has a lot of different meanings – one of which is a title of the Supreme God. Although I could go into more detail on this, suffice it to say that it is used exclusively for God in Genesis 1-4.

One of the really interesting aspects of the charge that it is a sin to use titles or that it is somehow disrespectful, besides the fact that just about every Biblical figure of note uses them when speaking of/to God, is that we also have the testimony of Yeshua/Jesus and the Apostles, none of which ever utter the Tetragrammaton – even though there was one in Greek that we have archaeological evidence of. In English, the first-century Greek version of the Tetragrammaton would be rendered Iawe (ee-ah-way), and here is a link to [another blog post](#) with the information on that.

So are we to accuse Yeshua of sinning, or of not knowing the Name, or of being disrespectful, or any one of these accusations we see commonly flying around? May it never be! Not only did Yeshua never sin, but He always did the will of His Father. If He said the Name, it would be recorded for us. What we do see is Theos, Kyrios, and Pater – the Greek equivalents of God, Lord/Master, and Father. Abba (Aramaic for Father) is used only once by Yeshua (Mark 14:36) and twice by Paul (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6).

The case for using only a pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton YHVH, yod-hey-vav-hey, or the short form Yah is therefore without merit and would require one to ignore both the Hebrew and Greek canonical text, as well as the Septuagint (LXX), Dead Sea Scrolls, Pseudepigraphic writings, as well as all other Jewish writings through the Millennia. This is really a non-doctrine if someone is trying to enforce it – it has to be strong-armed because it has no Scriptural merit excepting for

an out of context reading of verses which promote the proclaiming of the Name – which is problematic to read exclusively as referring to a personal name because the word shem (name) also means reputation/renown. In the ancient Near Eastern world, everything was about honor/reputation/renown – in fact, we still equate a man’s “good name” as being equal to his reputation, not a collection of expressed syllables.

So should we be concerned about the Name of God? Absolutely – and I am talking about His reputation here. Speaking syllables is easy, anyone can do it according to their theory of how it was pronounced – but if we speak those syllables with our bad character backing it up, we are dragging that name through the manure we are wallowing in. No, we must take care that our character is superlative, that we go from glory to glory, becoming more and more like Yeshua, the express image of God and our example in all things.

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## Judgment in the Third Heaven: My Testimony



This is a story I rarely share but my friend Dinah encouraged me to a while back, and in the interest of keeping the leaven out of our homes this week I am going to go ahead and share it here. This is not a complimentary story about me –

it doesn't make me special; I think it happened was because I was such a desperate case and such a dangerous person – and yet, God still had a plan for my life.

(FYI: It took me forever to come up with a title to this and I am still not happy with it – it sounds pretentious but if you

keep reading you will understand why I have no reason to be proud of what happened)

I was living in a small town in New Mexico in 2008 – my kids were in first grade, and it was Fall – I remember because I was in the backyard raking leaves. I had, a few months earlier, prayed the kind of prayer that only insane people pray, “Lord Jesus, judge me in this life while I still have time to change.”

I meant that prayer with all my heart. I was an angry, wounded, hot mess of a person. I distrusted God, loved Jesus, and saw no way around that inherent conflict – but although I distrusted God, I desperately wanted Him to love me. I won't go into the reasons why I felt that way about Him. There are too many, and that isn't the point.

I was a racist, and my specific brand of racism was on full alert living in a town that was largely illegal aliens and their children and grandchildren. It was also helped along by the fact that, in that town, it was a definite two-way street with all too many people.

But I also didn't know anything about how to be a loving person – I knew how to be a critical, unpleasable person. I knew how to justify my harshness as the “truth spoken in love.” In short, I was an expert at coming up with reasons why everything I did and thought was really okay, and those justifications went up quickly, and without a thought every time the Holy Spirit approached me about what I was actually doing.

I was the most dangerous kind of believer – I was incredibly intelligent, well-read, zealous beyond belief, confident in what I was doing and in my “anointing” – but on the inside, I was as much of a murderer as Paul ever was. I would tear a person who disagreed with me down without so much as a look backward. The problem was this – I was also having dreams about being surrounded by children, and during those moments when my guard was down, the Spirit was urgently impressing upon me that I was in no way prepared to be the kind of person

whom children would need.

That's the easy part of the story to tell – the part no one has any trouble believing. That actually isn't embarrassing anymore to talk about – what God had to do to me to get me to begin to change is why I am crying right now.

Like I said – I was raking leaves. Then all of a sudden I wasn't in my backyard anymore. I guess maybe I was in what Paul called the "third heaven" – I don't know. To be honest, I didn't look around, I was aware of the Shekinah enthroned in front of me, and a man standing to my left, wearing white. I never saw His face; I never looked up. No one ever spoke at all. When you are being judged, you don't notice much of anything else. You just can't. Or at least I couldn't.

There is a verse about being judged by every careless word and another which explains that the Word judges the thoughts and intentions of our heart.

I want you to imagine every terrible thing you have ever thought and said – not the things you knew were wrong and repented of, but the things you quickly made excuses for and lied to yourself about – the things you did to hurt people because you wanted to be hurtful, you wanted them to know you were a better believer, or superior; think about the real intentions and hidden motivations in your words and actions that you lied to yourself about, and lied about so often that you actually began to believe your own lies. Those lies that worked to protect you from the truth about how cruel you really were and even intended to be – truths that hurt so bad that you dare not face one at a time, let alone all of them at once.

No one, and especially not me, ever said a word. I was in agony that I cannot describe. We are used to our own egos coming to our rescue when we behave in evil ways – those defense mechanisms pop up before we know it and they are so deft at deceiving us that we rarely even get a twinge to our conscience after a while. We want the lies, not the truth. It is easy to say otherwise before you stand before God to face

them all at once.

I realize now that I was taken there, not because I deserved a glimpse of the throne room of God, but because that was the only place where my ego would stand down. In the presence of pure light and truth, not only was my physical mouth shut – but so was my internal voice. I had no defense attorney in that room – I was exposed completely with no ability to justify anything. What I became aware of was the truth about everything I had ever said or thought or did – and the truth about why I said and thought and did those things. You just can't imagine seeing yourself for who you really are.

Funny – to be in the room with Father and Son and not to hear their voices, or condemnation. No instruction, no revelation of doctrine, no corrections to what I already believed. No calendars, no Names, no challenges about what I was eating or doing on my Saturdays. Everything was about my character, which was very, very bad. That was the reason I was there – evidently, that was my most important issue – the biggest problem.

I am still shocked that I was able to stand, but sometimes I wonder if I was just frozen in place. I don't know; all I was aware of was the agony of seeing myself as I was, with no respite and nowhere to hide. I don't know how long it took – eternity is just different. What I became increasingly aware of as it went on was that Father and Son were not there to condemn me but to expose and support me. I started to realize that if they were not there, I probably would have died from the strain. I cannot even begin to relate how horrible it is to see yourself without the self-deceptive and protective filter of ego.

When it was over, I was back in my backyard – rake in hand as if nothing had ever happened. I was ashamed – in some ways I felt very empty, and in other ways, I felt very full. As I recall, it was actually a week or two before my ego tried to kick back in and start lying to me again – but it has never been nearly as successful as it used to be. Ego gets stronger when I am angry, hurt or have been betrayed – but my success

at deceiving myself has been hampered – when I am acting like a jerk, I am generally keenly aware of it and have to force myself to believe otherwise – self-deception is no longer effortless. I am constantly faced with my shortcomings.

No, I can't tell you what color Messiah is, I saw hands, but it wasn't like that – color like we think of it. White but certainly not white, and yet, white. I never lifted my eyes past the hands. No, I didn't see nail holes either – just hands from the side view where they wouldn't be visible anyway. I was aware of much but saw little; the experience was too overwhelming and terrible. It was also the best thing that ever happened to me. Drastically bad character requires drastic measures from God. I had a calling to work with children – that's why I prayed that prayer in the first place – I knew I wasn't ready. Ministering to adults is bad enough, but with kids, there is no room to be in the flesh all the time.

I hate sharing this because someone might think I am bragging – but believe me, this was not like any of the throne room trips of the prophets. I wasn't hearing the secret counsel of God or seeing the glorious things there. I didn't eat a covenant meal or hear His voice or listen to the Angels singing. I didn't deserve any of that. In very human terms, I was taken to the principal's office and stripped of my unearned false pride, deprived of every excuse and any pretense of – it's still hard to explain. When I returned, it was without a shred of faith in myself. I have never trusted myself since that day, and that's why I am constantly questioning myself – especially when I feel like I am in the right. Most people have no clue the depths of self-deception they are capable of – but that knowledge was God's gift to me. It is an undeniable truth. The awareness goes deeper with each passing year – what I faced in the throne room was just the correction, it wasn't the end. It spurs me on to be more like Him because remaining the way I am is just too painful to contemplate.

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# Guest Blog: You're In God's Army Now!



So, my second official Guest Blog, I hope you are as excited about it as I am. About a month or so ago, I got this awesome idea of comparing the concept of being the image-bearers of God to the real life context of how soldiers represent their country. I just had a small problem – I have never been in

the military and would be forced to fake an article, which I was not willing to do. Fortunately, I have this amazing colleague who actually is military, and who studies with the Wisdom in Torah Talmidim teachers – so when I told him that I wanted and asked politely (begged might be more accurate), he said yes! So, without further ado – here is Matt Nappier of Beit Shalom congregation in Monroe, La.

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I often like to take inventory of my personal space and the interactions around my small slice of this world to see God wherever it is I happen to find myself. Over time and as I've grown, like all of us, I've found Him within many different experiences. When my wife and I decided to start a farm, our sole focus in the beginning, and hopefully still, was to learn to see God in a deeper way through His creation, digging our hands into the most basic aspect of it. Before that, we became parents, and our prayer was that God would not only show to us how to be great parents but also reveal to us a deeper understanding of Him as Father. Going even further back, as we were married, our prayer was that God not only would teach us to be fruitful spouses to each other but also

that he would guide us in showing the world that relationship He desires to have with all of creation.

One other identity I hold is that of an Army soldier over the last 15 years. Having just graduated from another leadership course, I find myself also looking for God in those experiences. As the Army has trained me over the years to be a leader within its ranks, I have prayed God that God will continue to show me how to use those tools to be a leader within the ranks of His Kingdom on earth. While I was away, one emerging area of contemplation for me has been that of the ancient concept of humans as the image-bearers of God; as a result, a physical picture of what that means has presented itself, as so many other times, in the experiences around me.

I'd like to offer somewhat of an analogy, a physical comparison of something we may relate to today to help illustrate what it means to be the image-bearers of God on earth. I'd like to paint this picture through the palette of my career in the US Army. Let me be clear that I'm not suggesting that the Army of the United States is a good or equal comparison to God's Kingdom and reiterate that this is simply an analogy in the physical world around us.

Although my focus for this comparison is our current worldview and responsibilities as image-bearers in the Kingdom of God here on earth, carrying the identity we have through Yeshua (Jesus) our Messiah, it wouldn't be correct if I failed to mention the original image-bearers of God – Adam and Eve.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

-Genesis 1:26-27

At the very inception of our existence as human beings, the intention was that we should be the image-bearers of God. Often, we overlook the middle section of those verses that states our image-bearing is in relation to the dominion of the world, bringing God to all creation. Anglican bishop, professor, and theologian N.T. Wright explains that image as being like a mirror one looks into at an angle – seeing a reflection, not of themselves but another that is standing a few feet away. When creation looked to Adam and Eve, they should have been able to see God, but Adam and Eve corrupted that image. Since then, God has been working through His creation to restore the Creation Covenant made with us, humans, to restore us as His proper image-bearers on earth.

Fast forward to the first century, and we are given Yeshua, the incorruptible image of the invisible God, the One Who came to establish order and restore the image-bearers back to the intended image. Through His restorative act of the resurrection, we are no longer captives to sin, nor are we slaves to bearing the burden and image of Egyptian captors, but are instead set free to walk out into the world bearing the true image of our God, King, and Creator. That freedom, however, comes with a heavy responsibility.

When a person joins the military, their very first action as a soldier, sailor, marine, or airman is to raise their right hand and swear to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies. We even call on God to help us do this, and this moment is always a very solemn one. I don't know many brothers or sisters in arms that don't remember that moment of raising their right hand. It's serious. There's a real task at hand, one that can very well include an enemy threat. As I assume anyone reading this would agree, the seriousness of the task we undertook by coming into Covenant and swearing allegiance to the Body of Messiah has often been diminished. Can you imagine the seriousness of God's oath to Abraham when it was promised that his offspring would be a blessing to all

nations? Can you imagine the seriousness of the oath taken at the base of Mt. Sinai, which carried the expectation of being true image-bearers to the nations?

Once the oath is sworn, new recruits are then sent to Basic Training, the discipleship camp that transforms those who have never served into the image of a United States soldier. Through long hours of training and intense study of material, those who once only dreamed of what it looked like to be an Army soldier now embody the role. They've been given a uniform, taught how to stand and walk, and trained rigorously to be fit to fight. The great transformation occurs over a short nine weeks, and it's a remarkable change. Parents and loved ones often have trouble recognizing the new soldiers after they've completed those weeks. They've been transformed into the image that the Army desires.

These exterior changes, however, are not the important ones nor are they the most significant. These changes are merely the simplest and easiest. We throw some clothes on them, give them a haircut, and workout with them for nine weeks; this only accomplishes the external, or physical, changes. The harder task is changing what can't be seen: what's inside the soldier. The greatest change is only evident when we can see that a person has fully embodied the intent of their Army training – to be instilled with the Army Core Values that motivates us not only to be soldiers who can not only win any war but also have the integrity to win that war honorably.

For those who haven't heard of the Army Core Values, they consist of Leadership, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. These are the weightier matters of our service. That's quite a hefty list of characteristics, and so it is readily understandable that Basic Training can only be the beginning of this molding process. For many, it takes years to truly internalize these values, and for some, it never happens. Yet, this is the intent of the Army – to train soldiers that will fight and

fight honorably.

The United States Army has been the leading army in the world for quite some time now, and when we think back on why, it's because we fight the honorable fight. Sure, we may have hiccups along the way, but overall, we have fought to restore justice and righteousness in the world. Being the strongest army isn't all that matters – being the strongest and most honorable is. Think of WWII when we saw the Nazis as enemies, a force that fought hard yet failed to overcome the prowess of the United States. Yet, their strength never matters to anyone today because the world looks back with almost universal disgust at the shameful acts committed. They may have had strength, but no honor.

The Body of Messiah should work in similar fashion. We should be taking new believers through Basic Training, explaining to them in a quick, efficient manner those things which we are not to do at all. Our example is Acts 15 where we see new converts instructed to stop their overtly pagan practices, which was then supplemented with weekly training on how to walk out the task of becoming the image of God on earth. These quick changes, doing away with idolatry and the overt acts of worldliness, are akin to the uniform and haircut given within the first week at Basic Training. Yes, it changed our image a bit, but it wasn't a full transformation. Some may still look as weak and skinny as I did when I left for Basic Training. Others may still need to trim a little fat. Most importantly, they all need to continue to learn the values of how to take on the desired image honorably.

Every Sabbath, at our weekly training session, we should be learning more and more about what our new image in Messiah looks like and, following our Acts 15 example, that learning can and should come through the writings of Moses – the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. This is, functionally, the mission statement of our congregation, Beit Shalom Messianic Congregation. In our beginnings, we made a

decision that, no matter what else was taught, the instructions of Moses would be read in our community every Sabbath. Therefore, every service opens with a reading of the entire weekly Torah portion. This corresponds to the training, the putting on of the uniform, and the resultant trimming down or bulking up.

In the Messianic or Hebrew Roots movement, we've taken this new uniform or realized that maybe we weren't given the full uniform when we became believers in Messiah. Those that led us in giving us a haircut and a brown t-shirt sometimes innocently left us sitting in the barracks. We weren't given the full picture of what it meant to walk in the image of God. Yet, in our current understanding, we've found the uniform and performed those nine weeks of training – only to forget that the original intent was to instill those unseen values within us that would allow us to become members of God's Army fighting the enemies of His Constitution, the Torah, honorably.

We've taken these externals that are definitely part of the image of God, the uniform that anyone who sees us should know us by, and we've made that the end-all focus of our training as image-bearers. We've taken the easier things to change, tying on tzitziyot, taking some days off of work, and changing our diet; we implemented those while forgetting to tackle the tough, internal sins that serve to separate our character from God's character – as displayed in His love, righteousness, mercy, justice, and kindness.

In the Army, we judge those within our ranks to a harder degree, and this is done in the name of maintaining the proper image of an honorable institution. When soldiers get caught doing that which is dishonorable, things that go against the Army Core Values, they aren't allowed to remain in the ranks, and when we release them from the ranks, it's usually done in a manner that publicly shows what we expect in terms of honor.

However, if soldiers simply fail in maintaining the outward appearances, those physical changes that are easy to adjust, we help our brother or sister in arms make the necessary corrections. If we see a deficiency in a uniform, we make a simple on-the-spot correction, and we do so respectfully. We don't rip their uniform off and show everyone in the unit how they had missed a string on their pocket or had their boot laces out. If someone gains a little weight and can't pass the physical requirements, we put them on a program towards success and get them back in right standing, again, doing so respectfully.

I can see our flaws as a movement through these experiences – and how we can improve. We put on these uniforms, get a haircut, lost a little weight, and then we go around kicking in the doors of innocent people – poking our chests out as though wearing medals, yet having earned none. We've put on the easy physical changes, but haven't embraced the deeper changes that come through painful refinement. I see our Core Values plainly laid out in the Scriptures, but are we working diligently to make sure those are our priorities in training?

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.

-Genesis 18:19

We all know that Abraham was blessed for keeping the instructions of God, but Abraham's leadership, his installation as the progenitor (commander) of the Israelite people, is ascribed to his walking in righteousness and justice. He not only kept the instructions of God but kept them honorably. He took the full image of God, inside and out, and went train those others coming after him, the children and his household to do the same.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
For they shall be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
For they shall inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
For they shall obtain mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
For they shall see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,  
For they shall be called sons of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

-Matthew 5:3-12

Are we walking in the deeper image that was shown to us through the perfect image of God made manifest in the flesh? Are we seeking mercy, peace, and righteousness? Are we turning the other cheek when others mock us through the new 1<sup>st</sup> Century world of shame: Facebook and YouTube? Are we putting on the uniform and cutting our hair but forgetting to comfort those around us, humble ourselves, and serve as Yeshua taught us to serve?

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

-Galatians 5:22-23

This list, given to us in Galatians, represents our Core Values. When people look at us, the covenant members of

Israel and God's Army, do they see love, joy, and peace, or do they see a bunch of strife, bitterness, and hatred wrapped in the physical changes of tzitziyot, Sabbath, and Feast Days? I can't tell you how many times in the past I've been involved in arguments full of sarcasm and negative speech towards others on the Sabbath, and I see it going on every week around the world. Are people seeing us and seeing the image of a longsuffering God, or are they seeing short-sightedness that cuts people down if they don't immediately mold to the image of ourselves? Do people see kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness in our walks, or are they seeing harshness and rudeness towards those that don't agree with us? And finally, do they see the image of our God in self-control, or do they see people who can't control their tongues?

Have we become First Century Judaism, a sea of people trying to build others into the image of ourselves rather than the image of God, not hesitating to cut down our brothers and sisters when they don't conform? Have we lost sight of the fact that we are supposed to be the image of a God who is abounding in mercy, goodness, graciousness, and longsuffering?

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

-Exodus 34:6-7

I want to share one more Core Value verse with you, one that has been a focus for me over the past year, one that God keeps bringing back to me.

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord

-Hebrews 12:14

How do we present the image of the one true God to the world, being right and honorable image-bearers for His name's sake? – We pursue peace with all people, as well as holiness. We don't forsake those things that we realized we weren't taught, the holiness in our walk of Sabbath, Kosher, Feasts, Tassels, and more. We most definitely need those physical acts of holiness to point the world around us to the invisible God that desires an intimate relationship with all – but when we pursue holiness without peace, without walking out that holiness honorably, the world cannot and will not see the true image of God.

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## Twisted Scripture: Do We Really Get Blessed for Leaving Our Family?



Someone asked me a question on social media this morning and I am so glad they did! Having just finished a writing book on the community mindset and kinship relations of the ancient Near Eastern and First Century world

of the Hebrew Bible, the time is ripe to tackle Matthew 19:29:

*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or*

*father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (ESV)*

Sadly, in our modern world we get overly dramatic about this very dramatic verse – but in the entirely wrong direction. As Western individualists, we do not even begin to comprehend the absolute uniformity of belief that existed within ancient families – and how radical belief in Yeshua as the Divine Messiah truly became. We presume that this verse gives people permission to abandon unbelieving family, sometimes even over the slightest differences (let's face it, for some folks there are no small issues). Of course, along with these delusions of permission to walk out come fantasies of returning one day with soap poisoning and then they will be sorry, or not. Maybe not.

Anyway, I routinely get asked about this verse from people who are warned that they are in sin if they don't leave a spouse who does this or that thing because they ***honestly and genuinely*** don't believe that Torah is for Christians today. So, let's investigate this in context. But before we do – I want to tell you what I always tell them:

“Is your spouse guilty of anything other than being the exact same person you fell in love with and swore an oath before God to love, honor and cherish? You changed and they didn't – you don't get to punish them for that. They are the person you committed to, don't blame them for being that person.”

People in the ancient world were defined by their family unit:

Deborah, wife of Lappidoth

David, son of Jessie

Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus

Mary, wife of Cleopas

Jonathan, son of Saul

Identification by family told people who you were, your honor level within the community, identified your beliefs, and whether or not you could be trusted. If the head of the clan believed in and worshiped god X, then so did everyone else in the family from greatest to least. Period. It wasn't like it is today where the same family could conceivably be made up of Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus. Such a situation in the ancient world was unthinkable! The kinship group (extended family unit) was a sacred thing – loyalty towards one another was at the very core. Many of the commandments we take for granted – loving your neighbor commandments – were instituted because in the ancient world you loved your kin and to heck in a handbasket with anyone on the outside. That kind of absolute unity required, well, absolute uniformity of belief on everything from religion to politics. Any deviation introduced chaos into the family unit and was seen as the height of selfishness – truly destructive behavior. To have a different belief was to “leave” your house (not your physical abode but your extended family unit's core values), brothers and sisters (the most sacred of all kinship relations was that with your siblings), father (and the beliefs he set for the family), mother (and her diligent instruction in the beliefs of the father), children (and whatever you might have already trained them up in), and lands (literally meaning cultivated fields, which I believe is metaphoric language relating back to that which is inherited from the fathers – in those times, the most important inheritance was land).

To accept Yeshua as the Divine Messiah and the coming Davidic King, which many were beginning to do before His death, would potentially mean a significant break with the beliefs of the rest of the family. Jews were deeply divided about Yeshua, both before and after His death and resurrection. At one point, it is believed that up to 20% of Jews accepted Him as the Messiah – a staggering number but

certainly not the majority. One out of five family members believing something different than the rest – it may not seem huge in a world where we prize individuality and freedom to think and choose for ourselves what to believe – but that world was created at the Cross, before the cross such freedom never existed. It was practically unthinkable and very, very rare.

***It had already begun long before Yeshua's death – people were divided over Him. It was causing problems but Yeshua assured His followers that it was not, in fact, evil to break with family uniformity in order to come to faith.***

What Yeshua would never countenance is people actually breaking relationship, on their end, with family over Him. Destruction of family strikes at the heart of everything the Bible stands for. When Abraham left Ur, he was in his seventies, and he took with him his wife and entire family unit. Abraham changed location – he didn't pick up and abandon people just because they disagreed and we have no evidence that he ever broke relationship with his kin – in fact we know he didn't because he sent his servant back to his still loving family in order to procure a bride for Isaac. Abraham moved, yes, but never abandoned. He is our example, and yet in the first century, we add a new wrinkle and Yeshua makes it possible, in fact, gives permission, for people to lovingly believe in Him on an individual basis.

It may not seem radical to us, but Yeshua was addressing a very real problem that existed within very real first century families. It gives us permission to be lovingly separate in a belief, not license to act like boorish toddlers who threaten to run away if everyone refuses to bow to our beliefs. After all, what family would look kindly upon any belief that would break apart loving relationships? They would, rather, see it as proof of being decidedly un-Christlike and perhaps even dangerously cultish.

As my brother [Ryan White](#) mentioned when I brought this up this morning, “Allegiance to your current kinship group should never trump relationship with God.”

Exactly.

An excellent starting place for learning about kinship relations and Biblical social sciences, in general, is David deSilva’s Honor, Patronage, kinship and Purity.

Look for my next book in a few months – still waffling on the title.

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## [Is Standing Your Ground Destroying the Goal of God’s Word?](#)



Make sure you read the blog before you accuse me of endorsing sin or anything, okay?

One of the great unspoken truths about families is that we forgo some of our “rights” to individuality when we become part of one. We stop doing what is displeasing to those we love. Every Tuesday night out with the guys or gals might become one Tuesday a month with the guys or gals. Spending money on a fancy date night out often makes way for pizza and a movie in with the kids – at least until they are out of the

house again.

We have to change when we become part of a larger community. The family teaches us that on a small scale. Some families won't discuss politics when they are together to keep the peace – which was probably a wise thing this last election cycle. We recognize this restraint, this suppression of ego, as healthy and necessary for a measure of unity and comfort – love requires that we do not do to others what would be hateful to us.

Something I have noticed about the Hebrew Roots/Messianic movement (something I fight very much within myself) is the number of individuals who take the attitude that they will not be ruled over in anything, nor will they compromise on any issue. The local group has to keep my calendar, say the Name my way, believe all the same things that I believe (regardless of how little time I have been doing this or how little I actually study) or I will stay home or try and split the congregation to follow me – because there are seemingly no small issues that are worth bending on. Yet, we all bend for the sake of living in peace with our loved ones (or at least we should). There are too many people out there with the attitude that they will do exactly as they are doing until God Himself shows them differently. And I have said that in the past – to which I say now, “Wow, Tyler, really? I know you are trying to sound like you are just submitted to God but what you are really saying is that you are too proud to listen to anyone but God.”

Before anyone says, “What about Christians?” Well. What about them? Why does everything have to go back to what they are or are not doing wrong? I am tired of hearing people harp on mainstream Christians. We need to stop deflecting – our house is a mess, so let's clean it up and if we do a good enough job then maybe someone might actually want to be like us instead of wanting to avoid the mess! When I get on Andrew's back for not doing his Math homework, the last thing I want to hear is,

“Well, Matt didn’t do his yesterday.” That’s what we sound like – deflecting tattletales who are just trying to shirk personal responsibility.

Right now, when I look at the online Body of Messiah, I see a field of cells – most of which are as far away from any other cells as possible. Frankly, it looks like someone blew a person up with a bomb. A few are clumped together here and there, but the clumps aren’t connected to the Head so much as they are connected to a few choice doctrines. I see preppers clumped together, sacred namers clumped together and then subdivided by the, I don’t even know how many theories about, pronunciation, people clumped together over this or that calendar (I think there are like five, next year there will probably be six) – clumps, clumps and more clumps over this or that thing that is not Torah or Yeshua. People who are sometimes only willing to be guided and ruled by those who do not challenge them, or who might cause them to look and ask, “Is this really something to be joined to/divided from other people over or is it a smokescreen hiding my unwillingness to be part of the universal Body that is supposed to be united in Messiah despite differences in all this other stuff?”

Before someone thinks I am picking on people – don’t miss the point. Let’s look at the ideal situation – even if there was a worldwide Sanhedrin populated only with believers in Yeshua so that we could all come together as one – would you accept that authority if they didn’t agree with you on everything? If they made a decision about how and when to say the Name or when to determine the beginning of the month? What doctrines are so important to you that you would refuse to celebrate the Feasts as one people? I have been thinking about this over the last year. I freely admit that, when I began seriously considering it, I felt my desire not to be ruled by anyone, my fears, rising inside me – largely because I have had terrible experiences with leadership abuse in my past. And yet, there is something larger than my own fears – the testimony of

Yeshua. It's in shambles because of our over-reaching modern hyper-individuality. And frankly, the leadership abuse only flourishes because we have no worldwide leadership to appeal to. Heck, no one sane would want to be in leadership of this group of unapologetic individualists? So we have no worldwide leadership because we won't agree to be ruled and we are abused because there is no worldwide standard of leadership. What could go wrong?

We made a transition in my home a year ago. I stopped using our choice of the pronunciation of the Name, and we switched to the Hillel II calendar. I've been using HaShem, Adonai, Lord and God lately when I speak, and not because I hate the Name but because I detest the division that comes with speaking it. I feel like the Name is being defiled because no matter how I say it, someone out there will hear and crinkle their nose in distaste. I am not prepared to any longer be the cause of my God's Name inspiring someone to crinkle their nose in distaste and disapproval. If they are going to disapprove of something – let it be a title! I am also done with the calendar divisions. I can prove through the extra-Biblical writings exactly which calendar will be re-instituted, but it doesn't matter, because "my" calendar causes, again, people to think of the Feasts with distaste if I am not following theirs – which was exactly why the Hillel II calendar was created in the first place, to unite the Jews worldwide. The last Sanhedrin must have seen the potential for what I see on social media every day – the splintering of the Body.

I gave up some of my autonomy for the sake of being connected to the Head and unified to as many other cells as possible. I gave up autonomy, but not the actual commandments – simply gave up where I recognized that my opinions were a source of disunity that was all about me, me, and me under the auspices of being about Him. As I study Scriptural context more and more, I am seeing how my shallow reading of the Word was causing more division than it was curing. I am looking at the

bigger picture of what the Body needs right now, and the Body needs less autonomy and more working together as a cohesive unit with everyone focused on their jobs. If that requires me not doing everything I want to do and being less comfortable, then that is a small price to pay – really, the only price is my ego and my really strong desire not to be a part of a family; or maybe the real price is simply giving up on the secret hope of being the one person in charge of the entire family as they bow to doing everything my way, as though my way is God's way.

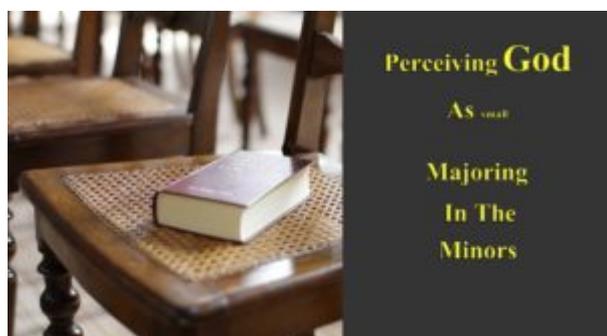
But God's way is about restoring what was there in Creation – the entire Bible is about restoring relationship, not about instituting arbitrary rules and regulations. If you can't see restoration as the ultimate goal of a Law, or a prophecy, or absolutely every verse of Scripture – if all you see are rigid standards to be imposed on behavior, then you have missed the point of the Word entirely. The Law is the milk, not the meat. The Law is what gets fed to babes in the faith, giving them a basic outer boundary of what constitutes decent behavior. Within those healthy boundaries we then are required, and guided by the Spirit, to not only be regulated on the outside, but to become transformed on the inside, to have our insides match our outward actions. I think a lot of folks harp on obedience to the Law because they see the Law as the meat of the Word, and have never allowed that Law to do its job – namely inspiring us to the greater works of the Torah, actually literally loving people even to the point of being willing to not always get our own way. Keeping a law in the flesh is easy, really easy. Being transformed into someone who no longer needs that external Law because it is so thoroughly internalised as the bare minimum – that's the tough part. I think as we get that, we will be able to compromise and come together for His sake, and forget about our sake.

I've been feeling this call since summer of 2014, a drawing together – but the cost to self and ego is high. Are we going

to remain entitlement-minded, individualistic Americans bent on our rights and our freedom of speech or are we prepared to become the Body of Messiah and the Nation of Israel, where we relinquish our autonomy for the sake of His glorious witness in the world? Will they know we are His by our self-sacrificing love for one another and our humble servanthood, or will they not want Him because they see how cruel we are when opposed? Are we willing to be a part of a Kingdom? We were not raised to think that this sort of choice is beneficial, but our autonomy will be our ruin if we don't make serious changes.

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## Perceiving God as Small: Majoring in the Minors



What does it mean to perceive God as smaller than we are? To see ourselves as huge and Himself as small?

Why do kids so often walk away from the faith when they walk out of the house? It's very simple – we as parents don't generally understand the purpose of Scripture. We have historically never instilled into them the idea that the Bible is a revelation of the character and nature of God – even though we think that's exactly what we are doing. We impose rules and regulations, yes, but those were only ever meant to be the basic outer boundaries of decent behavior towards God

and one another – the milk we feed the babes on – while we starve for the meat of being conformed to the character of God while we use the Bible for other, more self-serving, purposes.

What we have actually done with the Bible is abominable – we have used it as a tool of self-justification. Before anyone thinks that this only applies to unbelievers or “other denominations” let me make it clear that it is across the board and coming to Torah doesn’t change it for people – because it is a cultural paradigm. We were raised this way, it is a carefully trained blindness rooted not in religion actually, but a natural dislike and fear for anything that is different – especially anything that is a challenge to self.

We memorize verses that fit our doctrines, and those are the verses we teach to our kids – not that they will use them to worship and adore God, but so that they will follow the correct doctrines. We want everyone to do things the way we do them – otherwise, our foundations are challenged. Although we may claim to be zealous for God in defending our doctrines, generally it is about ourselves and wanting to be right.

We want to be right when we talk to scientists, so we turn the Bible into a science book when God never revealed Himself to man in order to teach science (I mean, what kind of a waste of time would that be and would we even be able to begin to understand science through His eyes?). The Bible becomes not about preaching the Gospel of God’s deliverance, but about overcoming the Big Bang Theory and Evolution, theories that by their very nature cannot be proven nor disproven (and I am speaking as a degreed chemist here – one who still loves science, in fact, and first saw God in the perfection of the periodic chart). In our hands, the Bible becomes a tool for justifying what we believe because in our heart of hearts we as a whole are embarrassed and seek to justify what we believe on the scientist’s turf. So we take the Bible over to them, we use a revelation of God’s character, written in Ancient Near Eastern and First Century context, and twist it into a scientific manifesto for our own purposes. Of course, science is only one of the areas in which we do this.

Now, our kids go off to college or into the world, and they often have only been indoctrinated with memory verses and Torah portions for the express purpose of making sure they believe the right stuff and associate with others who believe the right stuff. Some clever Science or Bible professor who knows more about the Scriptures than the parents brings other verses into the mix, and the now grown-up child who was only trained to justify doctrine now has a terrible quandary. The Bible was misused, it was treated as a tool for self-justification under the auspices of defending God, but it was honestly just being used for defending denominational doctrines.

All someone has to do is bring down one questionable doctrine and everything tumbles. They were trained in doctrine and had tied them all together and had mistaken doctrinal knowledge for a knowledge of God Himself. God was made small, and doctrine was made huge.

I rewatched a movie this weekend called Temple Grandin – although some parts are largely fictionalized, it teaches a powerful truth about perspective, and how we see things. I have been meditating upon it ever since because we have a very skewed perspective of our lives – we are always very large, and by and large we make God very small (yes, I do it too). We make doctrines big, and God small.

We do this through living lives of fear and self-justification – and we mask our self-justification as righteousness in many ways. It is easy to see self-justification when it is used to excuse sin – but it isn't as easy to see when we have camped around a small doctrinal issue and have made it big.

Case in point. Two people are in a room talking about God – they both agree that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the one true God and that Yeshua is the prophesied Messiah. They believe in the validity of Torah. They keep the Sabbaths and the Feasts.

Pause for a moment and look at how much they have in common,

it is huge in this life to meet someone who has those things in common with someone else. They ought to be worshiping and thanking God to meet such a person, right?

They get talking and find they disagree about the way the name is pronounced, or about whether the six days of Creation were or were not literal 24 hour days, or when the day or month begins and ends, or how to keep a certain commandment or whether a certain tradition is pagan, or whether we are all literal priests now. Just choose one of those things and watch what often happens:

Believing in the same God becomes small, and the point of disagreement becomes huge.

Believing in the same Messiah becomes small, and the point of disagreement becomes huge.

Believing in the same Torah becomes small, and the point of disagreement becomes huge.

Believing in the same Sabbaths and Feasts becomes small, and the point of disagreement becomes huge.

And suddenly, that "other" person is judged not based on these huge pillars – but upon opinions, which sometimes amount to nothing more than matchsticks waiting to kindle an unrighteous fire of division between brothers. And each side in the argument credits their stance and that judgment with zeal and righteousness – and both sides are deceived – because it is almost never a righteous zeal, it is ego and the defense of self and of one's own way of doing things. It has nothing to do with God and everything to do with self. If the zeal were righteous, there would be respect, kindness, patience and love instead of division, derision, and even hatred.

That right there – that is a picture of the First Century and what was going on with the Jewish factions, and a large part of why they hated each other so desperately and were so divided. That was the context of the coming of Messiah the

first time and a big part of the reason why He was murdered. The Jews didn't kill Messiah – perspective killed Messiah, a perspective that many of us show we still share today. The revelation of God's character was made small, in a culture that professed to live for Him wholeheartedly. We are as they were. Interestingly, the Jews grew up and figured it out and are now working together to rebuild the Temple. Groups that are radically different are coming together in love and respect to build an earthly throne for the God we all agree is the One True God and Whom we all agree should be worshiped with one voice. But here we are, arguing and divisive – and our kids are walking away from God because we lack perspective and major on the minors. I submit that most of our kids aren't actually walking away from God because they were never really walking *with* Him in the first place, not if all they know is doctrine and memory verses. Doctrine and memory verses devoid of inner transformation and the production of mature fruit – they can be cold companions when the times really do get tough.

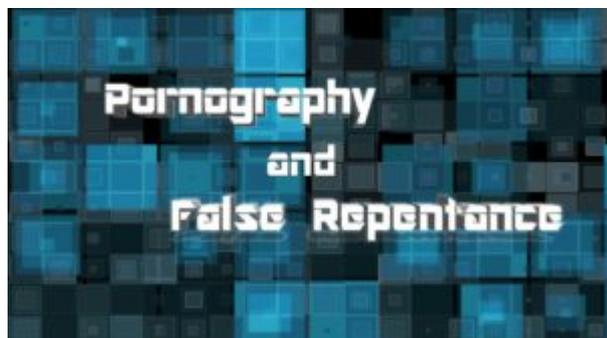
Make God big and allow everything else to be small. Make His character huge, and let other things be small. If we reflected God's character, for real, most of our kids wouldn't be able to bear walking away – because there would be nowhere else worth going. Doctrines are easy to drop, but truly godly character, humility, and a love for others borne out of keeping life in its proper perspective is hard to walk away from.

I want to share the part of the movie that introduced the focus of perspective

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chxCNEsu3YU>

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# Pornography and False Repentance



Yes, I am going there. I was a pornography addict from the ages of eight until twenty-nine when I came to Messiah, at which point I gave up all pornographic materials, struggled minute by minute in my thoughts for

another four years before I was released from those. Then sadly, for about ten more years, although I would never watch or read anything even remotely sexual, I had an overactive fantasy life in my head during times of stress before vowing by the Name of YHVH never to consciously do it again – so yes, I do get to address this. Yom Kippur is almost upon us, and this is an important topic that plagues the Body of Messiah – especially those in the ministry.

If you have never heard my testimony, it is [here](#).

My problem was very typical – partial repentance. Don't get me wrong, the bonfire of all the porn in my Idaho backyard took enormous willpower and a love for what is right. What I didn't have was enough love to give up the most potent form of porn, the fantasy life. Honestly, I felt that I deserved to experience that rush of emotions, the endorphin drugged state that any porn inspires. This was about entitlement – it was always about entitlement. Make no mistake; pornography is the cheapest addiction there is – you need nothing except an active imagination, although generally, that isn't enough. In my case, it had to be enough because I had no more willingness to look at the filth I had once wallowed in. I didn't want God to be looking at it through my eyes. I convinced myself, however, that I had every right to feel those feelings when I was stressed out, or sad.

The worst part was the mental gymnastics I would go through to justify it beforehand, "I know this is wrong, and I will repent afterward, but I need this. I need to feel this right now."

That right there is the difference between merely feeling guilt and having any intention of repenting. I had no intention of repenting! I sinned willingly, with forethought and self-justification – all the while knowing it was wrong and I simply planned to beg forgiveness later.

I felt guilty, but I wasn't truly sorry because part of me felt entirely justified. I had no intention of turning away from it, I simply begged forgiveness and said I was sorry to alleviate my guilt. I didn't love God enough or trust Him enough to believe that I could live without that perversion running around in my head from time to time.

Make no mistake – there is more false repentance associated with pornography addiction than with any other sin. People want to be free from the guilt and torment, but not from the pleasure.

I don't know what changed, but one day I did feel repentant – repentant but still too weak to resist on my own. I did my most drastic thing – I swore an oath by the Name of YHVH. It was the first time I had ever done such a thing – and at every point of temptation I had to ask myself, "Am I willing to drag His name through the mud and make it worthless just so that I can feel the endorphins?" Praise God, no, I was never willing to do that. I wasn't willing to break the second commandment even though I had been willing, in my mind, to shred the prohibition against adultery. As time went by, I found that I really didn't need those fantasies at all – I haven't died from endorphin deprivation all these years later.

Whenever we do something, after justifying it to ourselves with the intention of repenting afterward, that is not

repentance – that’s simply what we do in order to avoid the discomfort of feeling guilty. Really, not only is it self-deception, but it’s just a different sort of drug to make ourselves feel better. Do we want to justify gossiping, or holding a grudge, or whatever pet sin we have cloaked in “I have a right to do this because...” – we need to see it for what it is. Repenting afterward is nothing if we sinned with that plan of action in mind, just so we could feed our flesh, and experience something forbidden – true repentance means that we stop with the justification beforehand because it is a grave insult to God. Don’t get me wrong, that guilty feeling is usually a good thing – unless we shut it down or divert ourselves from having to deal with it. Then that guilt becomes a form of condemnation sending us deeper into sin – because we have been warned by the Spirit.

True repentance is hard. It is much easier to admit we were wrong and say sorry later after we did exactly what we wanted in the first place. Saying sorry is a small price to pay – and meaningless in this situation. Stopping, turning around and walking in a new direction is hard. Have you ever heard that it is easier to ask forgiveness than permission? Easy isn’t usually right, and oftentimes it is a presumptuous sin.

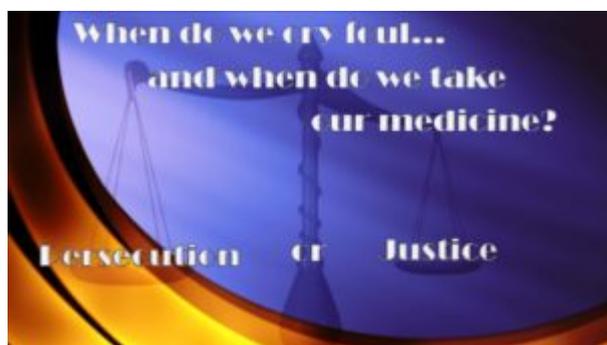
All that is to say, if you keep lapsing back into pornography, check out the validity of your repentance. Did you repent simply in order to make yourself feel better? If so, then the deep root of the problem is a focus on self, and I would wager it has its tendrils wrapped around every aspect of your life. I have never met an addict, myself included, who wasn’t self-absorbed – I still fight that. You have to be willing to deny yourself – pleasure, comfort, solace, excitement – and with women, generally the feelings of love and safety that we incorporate into the fantasies. We have to learn to sometimes be alone, sad and stressed out so that we can find and root out the real issues driving us towards the drug.

I am completely free now. It was difficult, nothing has ever

been more difficult, but God helped me. I had to fight and fight but in the end, the self-control I exerted was met with divine help. It was worth it. He didn't leave me to fight alone, but He didn't sweep the issues away like magic either. Repentance and redemption are a team effort – but our repentance has to be more than a relief valve for well-earned guilt.

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## Persecution or Judgement? When do we cry foul and when do we take our medicine?



I am getting a lot of this kind of correspondence at the moment so I want to cover it here to save me some time in counseling people. Nice when I can just have someone read a blog post. I get letters like this quite

often (this one will be a fictitious amalgam of quite a few situations over the years):

“Dear Tyler.

I have this terrible problem at church/assembly/synagogue/homegroup – the leaders are very controlling and they have suddenly turned on me, shaming me publicly, and even encouraging others to shun me. I don't even know what I have done wrong – I just disagreed on something that didn't seem like a big deal. I didn't deny Messiah or

anything, it's just a doctrinal disagreement for goodness sake – I never thought they would ever do something like this to me.”

I look at a letter like that and the same thing always goes through my mind, from long experience.

“I need you to be absolutely honest with me, have they ever done this to anyone else?”

“Yes, but...”

“Okay, when they did it to the other people, who did you support?”

“Um... the leadership.”

“Why?”

“Well gosh, I am not really sure – I mean, I guess I thought those other people had it coming and I really didn't want to rock the boat.”

This is the point where I always /facepalm and /sigh and get very real.

“How is the rest of the congregation treating you?”

“Well, they are supporting the leaders – I have been trying to meet with them and everything, but most don't want to hear my side of it and I guess they just don't care – the ones who do listen, they pretend to feel bad about what is happening but they do absolutely nothing about it so they obviously only feel a vague sense of discomfort! I feel like everyone just wishes that I would shut up and go away so that they can continue enjoying their fellowship. I don't understand why they don't care that the leadership is treating people this way. Why don't people care that I am being hurt?”

“When it happened to the other couple, did they try to reason

with you about what was happening to them?”

\*silence\*

“Yes, they did.”

“So then – what you did to your neighbor is being done to you now. You are not being persecuted by the leadership, you are being judged by God for standing by and allowing the leadership to persecute other people. Goodness, you may have even financially supported them while they did it!”

“But they are wrong...”

“Yes they may very well be wrong and probably are – Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, because God sent him on that task, but the *way* the Babylonians went about it was wrong because they were a wicked people. God has plenty of wicked people on the payroll (and many others in volunteer positions) that He uses to discipline people, He doesn't ask righteous people to do underhanded things to people – He simply allows unrighteous people to do what they are already inclined to do. You took part in something wicked against another family, and now their own pleas of protest are coming out of your mouth. Make no mistake, you will be ignored by your former allies because that is what you did to someone else – but be encouraged because you are being disciplined for a purpose. It would be worse for you if you were simply the kind of wicked person that is actively being used to discipline and refine others. Goodness, congregations are full of people like that who are beyond discipline and have become powers unto themselves – get down on your knees and thank God because He is giving you a chance to get out of that side of the equation. You and the other families in your congregation sinned against that family and YOU are being given a chance to get out and stop being a part of that sin in the future. Your eyes are being opened.”

I've never explained that to a person who didn't understand it

but some refuse to accept it – they still strive to show everyone how wronged they were, to a bunch of people who just don't care and may be absolutely incapable of caring at this stage of their walk. It would be nice if people did care when a congregation turns its collective back on someone over something either trivial or questionable, but in general we are a pretty unloving bunch – we generally don't care unless the person being betrayed is someone who we actually do love in an egotistical way (and by that I mean someone who, if they are shamed, it also touches upon our ego – like a spouse, child, or very close friend). Situations like this show how incredibly dysfunctional the Body of Messiah is in every single denomination I can think of – although certainly not every single congregation!

This goes for a lot of different things (from gossip in the pulpit to full blown sexual abuse silently consented to by the congregation), really, and yes sometimes you will have that rare occasion where a total innocent gets swept up in such a situation – but generally, when it happens to us as adults, we have already watched something similar happen to others and we just didn't care, or worse, we approved and participated. I used to mock people cruelly, and then I was disciplined and pulled out of that lifestyle. Now when I get mocked, I simply sigh and am not as surprised when people rally around the mocker – I remember how fun it was to watch before I was judged and how quickly my flesh moved me to see it as a good thing, to justify it at any cost so that I wouldn't have to peer into the darkness of my own heart. Generally anymore, it just makes me sick – not just to see the public shaming of someone and to understand how much and how deeply it hurts them, but when I watch how people justify the behavior – just like I used to. I get sick because I remember, and it grieves me that I was ever so cruel and so eager to believe that I was righteous as I was doing it.

We need to learn a lesson from the Babylonians – God uses the

wicked to refine those who should act righteously. Just because we are being used by God – well, it doesn't mean that we are any better in the inside than Nebuchadnezzar. Coming out of Babylon is much more complex than people give it credit for – in the end, Babylon was judged because of the excessive cruelty with which they treated God's people, even in the midst of the righteous covenant lawsuit judgement against them.

So embrace the judgement and allow it to teach you compassion – the people who do it may seem to prosper, but goodness, Babylon seemed to prosper for a long time too, until another wicked nation was used to judge it. We must be patient and allow God to work within the hearts of individuals, and sometimes the methods He uses are kinda ugly because... well we are kinda ugly. Until we get to the point where sins against others outrage us more than the sins committed against ourselves, we aren't there yet, and we need every ounce of discipline we can get.

And yet, woe to those who are being used to deliver it!