

2015-08-15

Self-centered Christian #1/Tzedekah

Hi all,

I was getting Chris dressed for the day while having a pity party, discouraged, with a to-do list the length of my arm - feeling overwhelmed and sorry for myself as I worked at getting him ready.

For those who are newer to my Weekly Thoughts, Chris is our oldest son, and was born with the umbilical cord around his neck in a slip knot; Each contraction cut off his air resulting in brain damage. As I write this, Chris is 35 but mentally about 4, though he takes in information at a higher level.

And so it was that pity-party morning I was internalizing my burdens while helping Chris. I had put his shirt on him, he had brushed his teeth with help from me, and so on, all the while I was silently complaining to the Father about everyone and everything but no one and no thing in particular, like:

"Father, I just feel like a beast of burden. All these demands from people. The physical part of caring for Chris, so many prayers and needs, people wanting money while we have such needs, people wanting everything from me from settling arguments to people who preach their pet doctrine at me, I have to record 2 months of teachings and write a month of Weekly Thoughts in the next week before my trips, and have Chris home a few days, and mow the grass and clear weeds. What am I Father, a beast of burden, or what?"

As I rambled on in silent half prayer & half complaint it was time to put Chris' socks on - so I'm kneeling on the floor in front of him fitting one sock on, just completing the thought; "...What am I Father, a beast of burden, or what?" when Chris reaches over and gently pats me on the top of my head and says sweetly:

"You're a good horse."

I laughed out loud and said "Okay Father, I get it, I recognize what just happened, I apologize - you just spoke through Chris and you're right and I'm so sorry." Chris has never called me a horse before or since but I knew Who was calling me a horse in mock pity. What a sense of humor and timing the Father has!

I changed my attitude, but just to drive His point home, Hebrews 12:4 suddenly came floating into my mind, 'You have not yet shed blood striving against sin', so it is clear He doesn't want to hear my complaints, lol.

This series has the potential to completely change your life because everything you have been taught about righteousness will be relearned, everything about healing, everything about divorce/remarriage, everything about giving and receiving, and discipleship - It will all become new.

I begin talking about self-centered or self-focused Christians by talking about righteousness. Why? Because we've been told righteousness means: "Right standing with God", but if that is your understanding, you can be in right standing with Him but hate yourself, hate your neighbor, and live a totally self-centered and self-focused life - But you're right before God because you believe in Jesus!!!

But that is NOT the complete picture of how the Bible describes righteousness.

Tzedakah

Let us go back to the Jewish understanding of one word translated as righteousness: Tzedakah: Understanding it as Jesus and the culture of the gospels did, and as the rabbis did, helps put Jesus' words into context (which I will do in major points in this series) which totally changes our ignorant Gentile understanding.

In Judaism a person can't have right standing with God unless they are also in right relationship with their fellow man. To say it another way, righteousness is not only vertical, but vertical AND

horizontal. Modern church culture leaves off the horizontal part (I think) because they just don't know it. But if you don't understand righteousness as Jesus did and does to our day, you will never understand Jesus nor what He is trying to do in you and in your life.

Everything Jesus taught in the gospels is founded upon this understanding - this is HIS understanding of righteousness. He taught if you are in relationship with the Father, you will also be in relationship with your fellow man. The foundation of why Jesus did miracles, healings, and 'went about doing good', is founded in His understanding of righteousness - you can't have the vertical unless you also have the horizontal.

Tzedakah is understood to be God's own character:

"For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the stranger in the land by giving him food and clothing." Deuteronomy 10:17-18

Notice the two parts to His self-description in the two sentences above: He is the honest Almighty God (vertical), and He demonstrates His integrity and right-ness by helping those in need (horizontal).

Everything Jesus said and did was an expression of tzedakah - righteousness. He taught the Father is righteous (vertical) and proved it by sending Him (horizontal - He so loved the world He gave).

Jesus' statements alone that He was from the Father and that the Father is good would not be enough in a culture that understood righteousness as both vertical and horizontal - So Jesus claimed to be from and in right relationship with the Father (vertical), and proved it horizontally by going about doing good and healing people.

We all know the Lord's prayer, but we've failed to understand it is a statement of tzedakah - that all of us who call God "Father" are expected to demonstrate His Fatherhood in our lives by our lifestyle and actions toward others, as He also does.

We have very well understood the vertical part of righteousness, but that is just enough of an understanding to make us dangerous; Self-centered, self-focused, heavenly minded to the point we are deluded into thinking relationships don't matter so we throw them away as if they are a disposable napkin.

Yet all Jesus did, and all the teaching of the New Testament is founded upon the Jewish understanding of tzedakah - and THAT is why God heals, that is why we give, that is why we make disciples, and that is why we walk in love and seek to keep the peace among the brethren:

Righteousness comes through faith in Christ (vertical), but it is of the heart and is unproven. Therefore God designed righteousness to be proven within (horizontal) relationships, and therein is the proof of our relationship with the Father.

So yes, I am a 'good horse', a beast of burden for others, but so are you. You can't be focused on self as a matter of lifestyle, nor have such an attitude for very long, and remain tzedakah before God. Good horse!

Next week #2 is understanding healing and miracles, and in part 3 about adultery/divorce/remarriage, and much more...Until next week, blessings,

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2015-08-22

Self-centered/Rightness? #2

Hi all,

Shortly after the USSR fell apart, I led a team to the city of Ekaterinburg, a city of over 1 million people sitting astride the Ural Mountains over 1,000 miles (1600km) east of Moscow, to help start a church. Over the course of the week we went to the main train and bus station to hand out advertisement about the meetings where I would be sharing the gospel. Those were innocent days that were too short-lived.

Their sudden exposure to the west brought confusion concerning fashions and a desperate effort to catch up. Having no context to set the decades of western styles in proper order, people would often wear clothing from various decades all at once: One man was wearing bell bottom jeans from the late 1960's with a pastel linen jacket from the early 1980's "Miami Vice" era (US TV show) topped by a baseball cap with an American team's emblem on it. One young woman was wearing a 1960's mini-skirt with old work boots and a woman's jacket from a polyester pants suit and had the big hair style of the 1980's.

It was all very sweet and innocent, and I was deeply touched by the hearts of the Russian people and their rich culture. I baptized about 400 people who had believed on the Lord that week and cherish those days.

Tzedakah

I've been talking about the Jewish understanding of righteousness, tzedakah in Hebrew, because tzedakah says if a person has right standing before God they will live that rightness in a flow outward to their fellow man. Church culture teaches right standing with God, while leaving off the (horizontal) flow to our neighbor.

But, if all we understand is the vertical, we can be like the crowd at the bus station where no one had the context to understand how each decade of style fit together. They could not be sure what to identify themselves with, and I see many Christians like that. We have Christians wearing 'streams of the faith' styles from many decades all together, having no context to establish to Whom they belong, therefore they seek an identity with some movement to prove their walk with God.

Someone may clothe themselves with the intercessor movement of the 1990's like a jacket, while wearing doctrinal shoes ready to walk through the Tribulation, with spiritual pants trying to relive the Toronto blessing. Or, they can wear the 'pre-tribulation rapture' hat with the inner healing coat and have their feet shod with the cowboy boots of simple church. But no matter the 'spiritual clothing' they cover themselves with for others to see, it is still all about them and their lives in a self-centered faith.

Why Jesus healed

Jesus' life in the gospels was living tzedakah as a flow of being right before the Father, and therefore He did healings and miracles as evidence of His righteousness - not just to prove who He was, - but as evidence His life was righteous and what He said about the Father was right and people could therefore believe in Him.

Acts 10:38 says "...How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power (vertical), who went about doing good and healing (horizontal) all that were oppressed of the devil."

Today the fact Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power and went about doing good is lost on us. Many want to have a greater anointing which they equate with a personal breakthrough or answered prayer or bigger ministry, but no one ever says they wanted to be anointed as Jesus was, to go about doing good.

Jesus did not go about 'doing good' trying to brand Himself as the newest product from heaven, He went about doing good because He IS good. And so is the Father. When He said He is meek and lowly in heart, He was telling the truth. He is meek and lowly because the Father is first meek and lowly.

When He turned water into wine He didn't advertise the fact but let the groom and bride receive the honor. Did you get that? Jesus though the Son of God in the flesh, allowed an unnamed bride & groom receive the credit and honor for the wine. Sometimes He would tell people not to tell anyone when He healed them. Those are His values. That is His humility. That is how He expressed tzedakah - righteousness.

In John 9 we have the healing of a man born blind that illustrates the Jewish understanding of righteousness being vertical AND horizontal. The man is brought before the rulers who had already stated in v24 they believed Jesus was a sinner. The blind man answered in v30-33 with his statement of tzedakah:

"Now we know that God doesn't hear sinners, but if any man is a worshipper of God AND does His will, him will He hear. Since the beginning of the world it has not been heard that any man has opened the eyes of one born blind. So if this man were not of God, He could do nothing."

Why have we been given the name of Jesus?

Healing and the things of the Spirit therefore aren't side-show attractions at the Christian Carnival, with people gathering to see a leg grow out or go to a meeting to see the latest 'manifestation' where God allegedly turns people into blathering idiots, causes them to bark like a dog, or shake like a leaf in the wind.

NO! Healing is part of God the Father's own tzedakah (right-ness), that He pours out to us because He is righteous. And in the flow of living water from the throne from Him through us*, that righteousness is to be demonstrated and proven by healing acts of love towards our fellow man!

*Revelation 22:1; John 7:38-39

Last week I was on a flight after visiting the Seattle/Vancouver Island/Vancouver areas. When I was seated I noticed the flight attendant holding her finger to her left ear. She kept rubbing her left ear, and I asked the Father if He wanted to heal her as clearly something was wrong. When I got the chance I asked if she was okay, and she said when the cabin door had opened after the previous flight there was a jet next to them that started its engines at that moment, and the sudden loud noise made her deaf in that ear.

I started to offer to lay hands on her but she dismissed my concern before I could ask outright to lay hands on her, quickly turning away to attend to preparations for take off. So I prayed this, "Father, I know every good and perfect gift comes down from you to us, and she is just doing her job and sustained this injury, would you touch her and heal her out of your mercy and because I'm asking you to?"

About 10 minutes later she walked down the aisle past me and I asked how she was doing, and she said, "It went back to normal just like that! Thanks for asking"...and I smiled in my heart at the Father's goodness, and the expression of tzedakah I was able to be part of.

Today we have 'healing evangelists' who make a great show of what they do. Today we have people who run to this meeting and that looking for the spectacular, thinking that is supernatural. Today we have people flocking to 'revival centers' where they think God is concentrating His presence, so they pick up their ear plugs at the door for what is called 'worship', and wait to see who will flop, shake, rattle and roll as a sign God is in their midst. And He graciously does what He can to meet people where they are, but there is a better and higher way...

We have been given the name of Jesus not to make a show, but to change people's lives where they live, as discreetly as Jesus turned water into wine and kept quiet*, as nonchalantly as miraculously reattaching Malchus' ear* after Peter had cut it off, as graciously as healing Peter's mother in law so she could attend to her guests.* What we find in house church is that most of the gifts of the Spirit operate outside the meetings, in day-to-day life, just as we see in Matthew through Acts. It is a Biblical understanding - God lives in people, not in temples made with hands* and it is within those relationships tzedakah is best demonstrated. (John 2, Luke 22:50-51, Mark 1:30-31, Acts 17:24)

Let us remove the 'spiritual clothing' from the various streams which cause us to be self-focused, and start living our right-standing with the Father as He intended, in a flow outward in tzedakah (righteousness) alleging and proving He is good and Jesus is His Son, with evidence to support those claims by our own lives, and the good He does through us.

Next week; Understanding marriage/divorce/adultery/remarriage in tzedakah

Blessings,

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2015-08-29

Self-centered/Right? #3, Marriage/divorce

Hi all,

This series is about tzedakah, righteousness in Hebrew, and my statement that a true disciple of Jesus (not just a believer, but a disciple) cannot live a self-focused life, but will undergo a process in which the Lord brings them through self-centeredness to turn outward towards others as they mature in Him.

Church culture teaches righteousness is just vertical, meaning 'right standing with God', but in Judaism a person cannot have right standing before God unless they also are in right standing before man.

Jesus made statements concerning adultery, fornication, divorce, and remarriage which can only be understood within the framework of tzedakah and the Jewish law of the day.

Here is the Israeli divorce law, from Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife. And if the second husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the second husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her first husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife...(she is allowed to become a third man's wife)."

That was it - that was the whole Israeli divorce law, and over the centuries debate raged under what conditions a man might divorce his wife.

Jesus is addressing the law of Deuteronomy 24 and the law of the day

The law of Jesus' day followed what a Rabbi named Hillel taught: That if the wife did something as minor as ruining what she was cooking and served a bad meal, it was grounds for divorce. Others said a man could divorce his wife simply if he found someone more beautiful than her.

Hillel's law WAS the law in Jesus' day - any man or woman* could divorce in a 'no fault' divorce just because they wanted someone better looking or the wife had cooked a bad meal or any other reason. Jesus' comments were focused directly against that law as He taught God's original intent. *Mark 10:12

Therefore to lift what Jesus said outside of Hillel's law and apply it to marriage and divorce today, is totally misrepresenting what Jesus was addressing here and has led to the bondage of many.

Why did God give divorce?

When Jesus was asked why God issued the divorce law if He intended man/wife to be together for life, He said it was 'due to the hardness of men's hearts*', meaning to be just, the Father had to provide a way of escape for an innocent spouse should their spouse harden his or her heart against them.

*Matthew 19:18

A hard heart in marriage was considered to include sex outside of marriage, neglect, abandonment, and physical or mental abuse. For any of those reasons God allows divorce. In every covenant there must be a way of escape if the covenant is broken, and divorce is the way of escape in a marriage for the innocent spouse - but the best case scenario is that a couple is together all their lives.

Modern contracts and covenants

For example: In a business contract there is always an 'escape clause' to protect each person or company. If you default on your mortgage, the way of escape for the bank is to get that house back and you to leave without any civil penalty. If you buy a house that is faulty and the seller knew it, there is provision for you to back out or make them repair it. And on it goes - in every covenant or contract there is a way of escape should one party fail to keep their terms of the covenant. Divorce is the God-provided 'escape clause' if spouse fails the covenant by hardening their heart against their spouse.

We have to define 'adultery' and 'fornication' as Jesus did

"You have heard it said of them of old time, You shall not commit adultery": But I say to you that whoever looks on another woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart...It has been said, *Whoever wants to divorce his wife, let him give her a bill of divorce. But I say to you, that whoever divorces his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries her that is divorced commits adultery." Matthew 5:28-32

*He is addressing the no-fault, for any reason law of the day. Jesus defined adultery as an affair of the heart, the imagination of a sexual relationship. To understand accurately what He is saying, we must understand it from tzedakah. Tzedakah says a man is not in right standing before God unless He is in right standing with his fellow man, and that horizontal righteousness starts in his marriage. Adultery is one spouse having imaginary sex/affair with another, making them unrighteous in that area. Today that would include porn, some TV, movies, or even articles/pictures in print that stir sexual imagination, and so on. In marriage one's imaginations should be confined to one's spouse.

The core reason for divorce?

Jesus said grounds for divorce is fornication, which is the act of sex outside one's marriage. Not adultery, the imagination, but rather the consummation of the imagination. The reason fornication is grounds for divorce is simple: The act of marriage is the physical consummation of vows of covenant made in the heart. For a married person to have sex with someone other than their spouse means they are consummating another covenant with the person, rendering the first void. Once revealed, it is up to the two to decide if they want to work at repairing their covenant of marriage, or leave it broken, divorce, and move on in life.

And as mentioned above, fornication is recognized as a hardening of one's heart against their spouse as well as abandonment, neglect, or abuse. All those are the breaking of the covenant. When a person vows words to the effect of loving, honoring, and cherishing the other all their days, and then breaks that by abusing, neglecting, or abandoning them, that too is breaking the covenant, and God's way of escape is divorce.

Adultery by Jesus' definition **was** the imagination and **a classification of the nature of the relationship**.

Therefore His statement that if a man divorces his wife for (let us say for burnt eggs) and marries another, the classification of that marriage is adulterous - it is not just before God - burnt eggs do not rise to the level of a hard heart against her husband. So to divorce her for burnt eggs is adulterous in nature, unjust against her.

The idea of Jesus classifying an illegal marriage in God's eyes as adulterous should not be a surprise, for we do it all the time. I've had many Christians tell me their marriage was one of lust, but then they were born again and God changed their hearts to be married for love. I've seen people enter into 'rebound' marriage(s) after a divorce or death of a spouse, to confess later they married due to loneliness. I've had men and women tell me they married for money, and only later did they adjust their heart as the Lord changed them to fall in love with their spouse. And a side note - using a reason like the above as an excuse to divorce is not just either, for in Christ all things can become new - but it will take work for them to fall in love the 'right' way.

So realize Jesus merely did what we do today - stating if a man/woman divorces for lust in their heart for another or for something minor like burnt eggs, that new marriage/relationship is by classification, adultery.

In summary, Jesus was addressing within tzedakah, the no-fault law of the day which allowed a man or woman to divorce at will. A person's righteousness vertically with God must also be horizontally first to their spouse. If they carry on an imaginary sexual affair in their mind with someone other than their spouse, they are committing adultery and aren't tzedakah in that area.

If they consummate that adultery with the physical act of sex with another, they are establishing a new covenant with that person, rendering their marriage covenant void, and because that was an illegal act, by classification that second marriage is adulterous in nature and not tzedakah. That consummation of another covenant by having sex with someone other than their spouse is indication of a hardening of the heart towards their spouse, and along with abuse, neglect, and abandonment, are grounds for divorce, allowing the innocent spouse a new start in life clean before the Lord.

I hope that clears up religious error so many people have been damaged by, and sets Jesus' words in context and the culture of the day. Next week tzedakah and understanding giving as you never have before. Blessings!

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2015-08-31

Deeper Detail about Jewish Divorce Law & Jesus' Statements - # 3A

Hello everyone,

While I've received many 'thank you' emails concerning last Friday's 'Thoughts' concerning tzedakah and Jesus' comments on divorce, there were also many people asking specific information unique to their situation or unique to what they've been taught.

So I thought it would be good to go into deeper context which should cover most questions for those who have them, and provide a deeper understanding for all. Here again is the Jewish divorce law:

"When a man marries a wife, and it comes to pass she has no more favor in his eyes because he has found **some uncleanness in her**, let him write her a bill of divorce and give it to her and send her out of the house. And when she has left the house she may go and become another man's wife. But if the second husband hates her, let him give her a bill of divorce and send her out, or if the second husband die (she may become another man's wife). But her first husband may not take her again as his wife for she has since been another man's wife..." Deuteronomy 24:1-4

No one knew what exactly the phrase 'some uncleanness in her' meant, and by the time of Malachi the priests were not walking with the Lord and doing many abominable things ranging from offering for sacrifice the weak, sick, and too old to be productive animals, the worst of the grain and so forth, and refusing to tithe and give offerings.

They also took a very liberal view of 'uncleanness' and used it to marry and divorce at will. It is in Malachi 2:14-16 the Lord rebukes the priests for dealing 'treacherously' with the 'wives of your youth' and He states He hates divorce.

Unfortunately some have taken that one statement that He hates divorce to mean a doctrinal statement against all divorce, which doesn't even stand up to logic since He was the one who gave the Law to Moses at the start. When you add in the fact that God is divorced, stating He gave Israel the bill of divorcement in Jeremiah 3:8 among other places, AND that Jesus would later state why God gave divorce due to the hardness of men's hearts as a way of escape for the innocent spouse, it all makes sense.

He does hate divorce – as the priests in Malachi were using it, marrying and divorcing at will.

When we come to Jesus' day there were 2 men who He probably knew; respected Rabbi's, one named Shammai and the other Hillel. The debate in Jesus' day had only intensified in the 400 years since Malachi was used of the Lord to rebuke the corrupt priests of his day.

Shammai taught that the wording of the law of divorce, 'some uncleanness in her' of Deuteronomy 24, was a reference to 2 chapters earlier in the law of marrying a virgin. Deuteronomy 22:13-18 states that if a man takes a wife and 'goes in unto her' and finds he hates her, because on their wedding night he discovered she was not a virgin as she had claimed, he could divorce her or even have her stoned to death if he wished to press charges.

Incidentally, when Mary confessed to Joseph she was with child, he considered this very law, but scripture says 'he was a good man' and only sought a quiet divorce. Had he wished, he could have pressed charges and had Mary executed.

But in Deuteronomy 22, if the woman was indeed a virgin she could bring out the bed sheets from their wedding night, still covered in blood and body fluids, to prove her hymen was broken that night and she indeed a virgin. The custom was that she would keep these sheets, called 'the tokens of her virginity' all her life, for even if 30 years later in marriage, if the husband slandered her or made accusations about their early life together, she had the means to defend her honor.

And so Shammai taught that Deuteronomy's 'uncleanness' in the divorce law was a reference to two chapters earlier, and if a man divorced his wife except for fornication (sex with another man) before the wedding, it would be an unjust divorce, causing her to commit adultery as a classification of her next marriage, and the husband who unjustly divorced her and remarried, would be in an adulterous marriage – one founded upon unjust and morally illegal grounds.

Rabbi Hillel however, who died in the year 30AD, prevailed however, and taught if the wife cooked a bad meal that rose to the level of 'uncleanness' of Deuteronomy 24, and a husband could therefore divorce her and remarry at will – Rabbi Akiva even said if the husband found another woman more beautiful than his wife, her declining beauty rose to the level of 'some uncleanness' as well, and he could divorce her just because he wanted a prettier wife.

THAT was the argument Jesus was brought into. Therefore when Jesus said in Matthew 5:31-32 what He said, He was talking about Hillel and Akiva's law, which was the law of the day:

"It has been said, 'Whoever wants to divorce his wife, let him simply give her a bill of divorce and send her away.' But I say to you (referring back to Shammai and Deuteronomy 24's original intent) That whoever divorces his wife except for fornication, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries her commits adultery."

He is talking about the original intent God meant in Deuteronomy 24, confirming Rabbi Shammai's teaching that it reference chapter 22, just a few verses earlier, talking about a woman who claimed to be a virgin but was found to have already had sex with someone else before her wedding. In that case, Jesus said the divorce would be legal, but if for any other reason, the category of relationship would be adultery as it would have been an unjust divorce.

Because Hillel's law was THE law of the land, the priests and leaders did not like that – and when pressed for the reason God gave the law of divorce in the first place if His intent was for husband and wife to be together all their lives, Jesus said it was due to the hardness of men's hearts.

And that included, even in Jesus' day, fornication, abuse, neglect, abandonment – as per last Friday's Weekly Thoughts on the subject.

Now time for my opinion – Because Christians and indeed most pastors, don't know the context of Jesus's statements, even though they were all taught in Bible school that the first rule of interpretation of the Bible is to understand who it was spoken/written to, and how they understood it, and that any further understanding in our day must agree with and build upon their understanding – they're guilty of trapping in condemnation God's people when God Himself has provided divorce as a way of escape out of a broken covenant – broken by hard hearts resulting in fornication (sex outside of marriage), abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

There is a lot of bad teaching out there. I've been asked on a couple of occasions to agree in prayer with a heart-broken ex-wife of some man, that he would come back to her even though he is now remarried. In a couple of situations the divorce occurred some 10 years earlier and the husband remarried and had 2 kids of his own with his 2nd wife, but the wife who came for prayer wanted me to pray God would break up his 2nd marriage to bring him back to her.

Each time they had been taught 'God hates divorce' and that a covenant though broken by 1 party, was still in effect and could be prayed for to be made a whole covenant again. I've had the sad duty to inform these women that the only part of the covenant that remains between her and her ex husband, is their children, and in that element of their covenant of marriage, they still must cooperate as they were born of that covenant, though now broken.

But God won't break up marriage #2 to get hubby back with wife #1. The good news from Deuteronomy 24, let us not lose sight of that, is that it provides for her (or him) to marry a 2nd and even a 3rd time – again, divorce used with the intent God gave it, is to allow the innocent spouse to escape from a broken covenant and rebuild their lives.

I hope this addendum helps answer questions – blessings!

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2015-09-05

Self-center/righteous? #4 (Giving tzedakah)

Hi all,

I've been talking about tzedakah, often translated as 'righteousness' in our Bibles, and how tzedakah in Hebrew culture and the Bible is both vertical AND horizontal. Tzedakah states for a person to be right with God vertically he must also be right with his fellow man 'horizontally'.

Giving and tzedakah

The word tzedakah means righteousness, but it so emphasizes the horizontal it is often translated as almsgiving, giving, or charity. Such is the importance of righteousness, that it also means 'giving to others'.

Think of that contrast for a minute - we've been taught in traditional church that righteousness means 'right standing with God', but the very word of tzedakah means 'giving to others' which is a natural part of the flow from a person in right standing with the Father.

Contrast why people give money, skills, talent, resources

In modern church culture people sometimes give to get - whether 100 fold return or trying to bribe or manipulate God as a means of meeting their need. Sometimes people give to remind Him they have a need and it is urgent. We've been told to "plant a seed, give to get, and God will help, you bet."

Relatively rare is the person who gives purely out of love of God and appreciation for the work of ministry someone is doing, with no return expected. That is where the true blessing is. The Rabbi's noted the same human nature in their day, and stated the most pure form of giving is to help bury the dead, for that is the one way of giving there is guaranteed no way for a person to get something back from them, lol. I prefer to say "**giving is its own reward**".

In tzedakah giving is a natural outflow of our right standing before God as a way of life, not an event. In Jesus' day it was taught that people who received alms - the lepers, the lame, the blind, the widows, the Levite's and priests - were expected to take from what they received and give part of it to someone else in need, so the cycle of giving and receiving in Israel never stopped, but made a big circle.

The tithe of the Old Testament was actually in 4 parts over the course of 6 out of 7 years: First fruits, First tithe, Tithe of the tithe, and Second tithe. There were no tithes given in year 7.

In years 1, 2, 4, 5, the Second tithe was taken to Jerusalem and offered to the Lord in the temple, and then taken back and eaten by the people who brought it, in a big party inviting all the poor, immigrants, Levite's, and priests to come and eat*. On years 3 and 6 that Second tithe didn't get taken to the temple, but stayed within the community, the party being for the local people only. Deuteronomy 14:22-29, 15:1-11

The First fruits once offered to the Lord in the temple went for the priest's consumption, and the first tithe went to them and the rest of the Levites. Then the Levites gave their tithe from that to the priests, and their second tithe was then given to the people. The priests and Levites were considered to be on the same level as the poor as they weren't allowed to own businesses and could therefore expect support from the people they served, but they also tithed on the tithes they received, back to the people - so you see it all moved in a big circle back to the people.

That means tithing and giving was never to support a huge structure and bureaucracy, but has always been for the direct support of God's people, including ministers.

In Acts 2 through 6 we see people giving among themselves and to leadership to the point there were no needs in their midst, similar to the above - everyone who came up short on their obligations had their needs met by others - but when the church moved out of homes and into the auditorium in the 300's AD, it turned the relationships with people into relationships with buildings and programs.

Accountability therefore in the auditorium is measured by attendance, giving, and volunteering, while accountability in the healthy, family based churches that meet in homes, is as Jesus stated - if your

brother has an issue with you, go to him and settle it. It is that simple, but requires maturity and love of all.

Understanding tithing and tzedakah

Unfortunately in some streams of the faith tithing has been given equal importance or even greater than water and Holy Spirit baptisms and the Lord's Supper. God relates to us through the blood of Jesus, not our bank accounts. You aren't cursed at giving 9.99% and suddenly become blessed at 10.01%.

The tithe isn't even taught in the New Testament letters because the NT was written by apostles doing home church and writing to people in home church, therefore giving all they had as needs arose governed by love and respect was how they lived. Christ is in you, so you and He have to get together and decide how you are to give money and to whom; resources, talents, skills, time, and to whom. You and He get together. The NT is all about Christ in you, the hope of glory. So talk to Him about it.

It is very clear that givers, those who give as a matter of lifestyle as a natural outflow of their tzedakah - righteousness - are blessed with what is, having lived in it for decades, a covering of protection and timing that non-givers don't have. When you live a lifestyle of tzedakah you'll find you'll give way more than 10% and not even keep track - because it is your lifestyle!

Jesus said those who give will have it given back to them*, and Paul said givers 'have all grace abound' in their lives, and have their giving multiplied*. Besides all that, Paul said it is right that if ministers share spiritual things which are the highest truths, then those who receive those truths should give back (lower creation) material things*. Luke 6:38, II Corinthians 9:8-11, I Corinthians 9:7-14.

In my "Through Jewish Eyes" series I even mention a term used by the Lord in Isaiah 40:1-3 that is directly connected to tzedakah as it relates to giving to others: "Comfort, comfort to my people says the Lord. Speak words of comfort to Jerusalem and announce to her that her warfare is finished, that her iniquity is pardoned: **For she has received of the Lord's hand double for her sins**. The voice of one who cries in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord..."

To our ears, not understanding tzedakah as it relates to giving, speaking comfort to Jerusalem because she has received double for her sins because her iniquity is pardoned, is not understood.

The custom of righteousness being demonstrated by giving is seen in 'receiving double'. If a person was bankrupt before the year of release, they would write down on papyrus all their debts with a total amount, and tack that paper to their front door or gate in the hopes someone with one of the tithes mentioned above, would take some or all of their tithe and pay off their debts. If they did so they doubled up the paper and sealed it with their seal, marking the debt paid in full. It was called 'receiving double' for their debts.

What the Lord says in Isaiah 40:2 is to speak comforting words to Jerusalem because her iniquity has been pardoned, because she has received of the Lord's hand 'double' for her sins. He is the Person who gave of His own resources to pay their debt, directly linking righteousness to giving.

He paid out of His own 'pocket' so to speak, our debts. Not because He wanted something, not because He had needs, but because He IS righteous, and that is why He gave. Vertical and horizontal.

In this series I've explained why it is impossible for a true disciple, not just a believer, but a disciple, to be continually self-focused, self-centered. To be righteous before God one must also be righteous within relationships with others. It is by our love they will know us. That isn't love held silently and secretly in our hearts for others, but love demonstrated to others. That is tzedakah - righteousness.

New series next week...until then...blessings!

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