

Sabbath Sermon: From Death to Faithfulness

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First Fruits Ministries, an affiliate of Corner Fringe Ministries

Torah Portion: Acharei Mot (After the death); Leviticus 16:18; Ezekiel 22:1-19; Amos 9:7-15; Matthew 15:10-20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Hebrews 7:22-28: <https://tinyurl.com/y2ak67p9>.



Shabbat Shalom, brothers and sisters. Please turn to your neighbors with a hug or a handshake and say good morning with the love of our LORD Yeshua that dwells within us. — —[pause, title screen]

It's interesting when we look at the title of this week's Torah Portion, "Acharei Mot (אֲחֵרֵי מוֹת)," which means "after the death," we might think of the resurrection of our LORD Yeshua, because new life is what came next after His physical death. And why wouldn't we want to dwell on this beautiful Truth, particularly following the Holy season we just celebrated this past week? As we read in Hebrews 7:26-27, Yeshua is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and He has become higher than the heavens." He was our Unleavened Bread, our Lamb of God without blemish, and His perfect blood was spilled for us; He was sacrificed "once for all when He offered up Himself." He rose from the dead on the third day as the First Fruits of salvation, and now "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession" for us. (Hebrews 7:25). God lives, even though He allowed Himself to die on the cross when He came in the flesh. Yeshua has risen! And now those of us who belong to Him await our own resurrection into eternal life when He comes for His late harvest. This is His promise to us. We spoke about this last week and throughout the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and it is worthwhile and necessary to remember both what the LORD has accomplished for us as well as what He has promised to us as we face the trials and tribulations of each and every passing day.

But the title of this week's Torah Portion, "After the death," literally refers to the death of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron who offered "profane fire" before the LORD in the newly set up wilderness tabernacle of the Exodus, and God had not commanded them to do this. On account of their "strange" worship, the LORD put them to death on the spot, and it's not likely they will rise up to glory as our Messiah has. This story is noted briefly in Leviticus 10:1-2, which you can see up on the screen. Today's reading beginning in Leviticus 16 notes that "after the death of the two sons of Aaron," Yahweh explained to Moses that the Holy of Holies inside the veil of the Tabernacle was not a place to just wander into or treat as common. In fact, not even Aaron, the High Priest, could enter the room more than once per year without a sin offering for himself, his sons, and the people of Israel. After these offerings, He could enter the room with the ark of God containing the Ten Commandments, where the Spirit of God would appear in a cloud upon the mercy seat, once per year at Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. The LORD explained that the High Priest could not enter without sprinkling the blood of bulls and goats on the ark of God. What I want to note for today's purposes is the significance of this story coming up right after the Passover celebration. The writer of Hebrews makes a strong connection between Yeshua and the sacrificial goats of Yom Kippur, for the sins of all Israel were laid upon Him, just as Aaron and his sons laid Israel's sins on bulls and goats. As Aaron and his descendants sprinkled the blood of these beasts on the golden ark of God, marring what was most likely a gorgeous representation of God's throne in heaven, this created an image of the risen LORD walking before the altar of God in

Heaven, dripping His own blood all the way until He reached the Mercy Seat where He sat down at the right hand of God. As referenced a moment ago, the writer of Hebrews also explained that Yeshua replaced Aaron as a High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, and the Messiah's one-time sacrifice on the cross replaced all sacrifices that could ever be made by men. Today, we don't look only once a year to the throne of God through the sacrifices of a human intercessor who must be replaced when he dies, but we look to the risen and living Messiah at all times to intercede for those of us who trust in Him with humble and contrite hearts. We look to Yeshua as our one-time offering for sin, transgression and iniquity, and it is this grace of God through Yeshua that saves us from condemnation under the law. In Him and with His help, we can now walk in the newness of life, following His example every step of the way.

Now, while blood was sacrificed for the atonement of sin, in another interesting commandment God has said that we are not to eat blood. He said this before Messiah came through Moses and after Yeshua came through His Apostles. We read in Leviticus 17:10-12: "whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.' Therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.'" In Acts 15, James reiterated that Gentiles coming into the faith must not consume blood, among other things, lest they defile themselves. Why is this? The reason that God provided for this prohibition is this: the life is in the blood. In Hebrew, "life" comes from the word "nephesh" (נֶפֶשׁ), which translates to "soul" or "living being." The concept here is "life" for "life," or "soul" for "soul." A life must be sacrificed so that another life can be set free from sin and death.

Remember from Exodus 32:33, the LORD told Moses, "whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of my book." He's referring to the book of life in this comment, in a prophetic commentary concerning the end of days. In other words, whichever soul sins against the LORD, He will require a reckoning of a soul both now and forever. In Ezekiel 18:4, the LORD confirms: "Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die." Thus, through the death of a sacrificial soul, God has allowed atonement, or Kafar (כָּפַר), for another soul. He has allowed the blood of the one soul to cover over, pacify, or make propitiation for the sin of the other soul. But He does not want us to consume the blood, for the life is in the blood. Rather, this life must be poured out as the sacrifice as a propitiation for sin.

It may confuse some; it may even sound contradictory, then, when the LORD Yeshua instructed His disciples, saying in John 6:53-54, "Most assuredly I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the Last Day." Now, this resurrection on the Last Day is the very thing that Yeshua has enabled by dying for us and then rising up as the First Fruits of salvation. He did this for those of us who belong to Him at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). So how do we parse what God said in Leviticus 17:14; namely, "whoever eats [blood] shall be cut off." Perhaps it's bold of me to say, but I believe this apparent contradiction confuses more believers than any other in all of Scripture in rather significant ways. Yeshua's disciples were confused, also, and they asked Him about it, saying in verse 60: "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" I agree with them. It is a hard saying, and many still grossly misunderstand it today, but it is life to those who comprehend the Truth and believe.

And so, for those who have ears to hear, the LORD gave His response in verses 61-63 that addresses the apparent contradiction: “Does this offend you?,” He said. “What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” You see, as we read in Leviticus 17, “the life of the flesh is in the blood,” or as noted, “the soul of the flesh is in the blood.” Yeshua has made it clear that the flesh profits nothing, and so what was it that profited us? The words that He spoke were spirit and life to those who believe. Understanding what this means requires us to hear the LORD when He asks, “What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before?”

This is something that we attest to as faithful followers of Messiah Yeshua; namely, as Paul explains as “good news” in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, “that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” But not only was He seen risen from the dead, but He is also known to have returned to His former place on the throne in Heaven. At the end of Mark’s Gospel, the apostle testifies, “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into Heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.” Thus, Yeshua did not just come in the flesh and die on the cross, but He was resurrected from the dead. He was not just resurrected from the dead, but He then went to sit at the right hand of God on the throne in Heaven. And He did not just go to sit at the right hand of God after He rose from the dead, but He ascended to the same place where He was at before He came in the flesh, the same place He reigned as God from all of eternity.

There are several well-known verses that attest to this same Truth. First, Paul writes in Romans 10:9, “... if you confess with your mouth Yeshua as LORD, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Here also is a testimony of two. We cannot just believe that the power of God raised Yeshua to glorious eternal life, but we also must confess with our mouth that Yeshua is LORD—He’s God—He’s Yahweh—He’s the same “yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). The Father and the Son are one, with the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:5-11 provides another witness, where we read: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Messiah Yeshua, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Messiah Yeshua is LORD, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11). If every being in heaven, in the grave and on the earth is worshipping Yeshua, there is no doubt that His identity as the eternal Creator, Redeemer and Deliverer of all is secure. Yes, the Father and the Son are One, for as David reported in Psalm 110:1, “the LORD said to my LORD, ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” The word “until,” or “ad” (עד) in Hebrew, means “even” or “with the goal of.” In other words, the time of this complex unity between the Father and the Son did not begin and it does not end; rather,

our eternal God intends to accomplish yet one more goal and then He will continue on without His enemy forevermore, as One ever-existent, all-sufficient God.

We could do this all day with Scripture after Scripture, but I want to get back to the point here. When Yeshua said that whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood will inherit eternal life, ultimately He is using metaphorical language to teach deep spiritual meaning. The very eternal life of God, the soul of God, the nephesh of God, was put into the flesh of a man named Yeshua of Nazareth. And that eternal, immutable, unquenchable soul of God was poured out as a one-time sacrifice for all who believe in Him. In other words, His blood was sacrificed for our soul; His life was poured out for ours; His living soul was sacrificed so that we could live eternally with Him. And because His life is eternal, His sacrifice is also eternally sufficient to atone for sin. Thus, when we eat his body and drink His blood, we take into ourselves the understanding that Yeshua's sacrifice completely satisfied any claim against our lives and we trust His sacrifice on our behalf when we approach the altar of God. But it's more than this. You see, death could not hold the Author of life (Acts 2:24). The soul of our eternal God could not remain in the grave, for His very eternal power would not allow it. Though His temporary flesh would die, His spirit could never die. Peter makes this point clearly in Acts 3:15, when He exclaims: "You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses of the fact." How can God raise God from the dead, you might ask? This power that He had was sufficient in Himself, and this very understanding is the salvational faith that we must have—the body and blood that we have to consume. When we believe that Yeshua has risen from the dead, because death could not hold the soul of our eternal God, we can look to Him now as our perfect Redeemer who has purchased our lives and made a way for us back to Him without any consideration for the condemnation of sin. When we consume the Spirit of God, which is His Body, and the life of God, which is His blood, when we trust in what He has done for us and what still He promises to do, when we accept Him into ourselves, His eternal power will dwell in us and raise up our own soul from the grave at the appointed time.

And that leads us back to this: the soul who sins is sentenced to death; for whoever sins against God is subject to eternal separation from Him, but through Messiah Yeshua, the gift of God of His own Being sacrificed on our behalf, we can obtain eternal life, thanks be to God (Romans 6:23). Thus, we can only be written in the Lamb's Book of life by accepting His one-time sacrifice for our sins.

There is no salvation by any other means, and "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Ultimately, this is the message of the cross and the message of the resurrection, and "all the prophets witness that, through [the name of Yeshua], whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). The message of the cross may be foolishness to those who are perishing, but it makes logical sense to those who are being saved, because the power of God is self evident to those with faith (1 Corinthians 1:18).

I don't want to do a deep dive into this today, but allow me to summarize the logic of the cross as the LORD has allowed me to see it. It all started at the beginning, when our eternal God created the Heavens and the Earth and everything in them; not because He lacked any sufficiency in Himself, but because He desired to share His glory with beings who could interact with Him, appreciate what He had done for them, and receive His eternal blessings. He designed us to be in a loving relationship with Him, and in that relationship, He made everything perfect for us. We read in Genesis 1:31: "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." Implied in this statement is the idea that

anything outside of what God made was “not good,” or even “evil,” and God warned us against going our own way, even explaining that we would necessarily separate from Him if we did so. But why did God give us a choice to do anything apart from Him? In His holiness and on account of His love for us, God made humanity in His image with free will to choose His way or not, because goodness requires such freedom. Love, which is pure goodness, in its essence proclaims and embodies Truth but does not force obedience to it, because love does not force its own way. In other words, robotic “blind” obedience is not good according to God’s plan, but our desire to obey Him because we love the one who loved us first is very good. And so, in our free will, we ought to choose our Father’s way but we could potentially choose an evil way that would separate us from His goodness. This departure from God’s way is what Scripture calls sin, and sin separates us from God because our perfect Creator cannot abide with any creature that acts against His good and Holy nature. Separation from God is also known as death, and any separation whether permanent or temporary causes suffering, because only God and his way is good, and anything apart from Him is not good. And while the choice has always been up to us whether to go God’s way or not, God knew we would fall away from Him on account of the nature that He gave us, and yet He did not want us to suffer the consequence of this choice because He loves us and desires our fellowship. And so, because God had foreknowledge that we would exercise our free will choice to separate ourselves from Him, He would also take accountability for this eventuality by providing us with a way to return to Him. That Way, that Truth, and that Life is Yeshua, the very embodiment of God who came into His own creation in the form of one of His creatures so He could show us by example which way we ought to walk if we want to be in relationship with Him. And then, because He could not in His perfect holiness accept willfully unholy people into this communion, He offered His perfect self up as a sacrifice on our behalf to make atonement for our sins. When we accept this act of love from Him and desire His way rather than our own way on account of it, He offers us the opportunity to follow it, and even helps us do it. I believe this is what Yeshua meant when He said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:15-18). Yes, when we recognize our God, who He is, what His character is, and how much He loves us and desires to be with us, and when we desire Him and His will for our lives in response, and accept all that He has accomplished for us and promised to us as self evident Truth by acting in a way that bears this out, He will impart His own righteousness on us so we can return to full relationship with Him. One day He has promised to restore all things to the way it was in the beginning with one notable exception; namely, we will then understand the cost of sin and death—that it is a debt we can never repay. This is the body and blood that we must take in, for when we do, we will be a part of His Body, and His life will flow through us forever. There is an ancillary verse, which I’ve referenced a lot lately, that applies an agricultural metaphor for this same concept. Consider John 15:5, where Yeshua said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” You see, the vine is the body, and we receive the Spiritual gifts the body provides when we rely on it for food, and the fruit is the life blood, or the soul of the body that produces ever more abundantly for the good of all the more we trust in the source of all life, which is God. Without Yeshua, who is the source and end of both spirit and life, our very life will wither away to nothing and whatever is left will be burned up.

I do hope these words are helpful in bringing some understanding for you, because we’re about to shift gears to address some of the more weightier matters of the day. You see, the LORD has promised us

eternal life when we trust in Him and choose to follow Him, but He has promised separation to those who fail to do one or both of these two things, because He will not dwell with those who rebel against Him. I've struggled with how to address this problem lately, for there are so many good people who believe in God or even a "higher power," and yet they deny Messiah Yeshua. Is there some form of accepting Him that doesn't involve a direct confession that Yeshua is LORD? Scripture does not make room for such an idea, as I have tried to show here today, and I believe the Word of God is True. Think about this: God gave us one way into this world—any modern scientific perversions aside—and considering that Truth, why is it so hard to accept there's only one way into the next life? Yeshua, our "good shepherd" said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:1-5). And so there is no other way to Heaven than to accept the sacrificial body and blood that God offered on our behalf, and this Truth highlights the very urgency of our ministry of reconciliation to spread the good news as widely as our lives allow it. We certainly cannot earn our way there through our own righteous deeds. There is no way to build a tower into the Heavens and dethrone the king, though some have tried to their own destruction. No amount of money, power or fame can last forever, and nor does it bring life; rather it leads to misery and ultimately death.

King Solomon of Israel, after achieving wealth, power and fame to an extent that no other man has equalled before or since, concluded that all human efforts are "vanity" and there "is nothing new under the sun." In other words, any other way we might contrive to achieve eternal life is going to fail. There is no holy grail except the covenant offered by Yeshua. The conclusion of the whole matter, he said at the very end of his life, is to "fear God and keep His commandments." There is no other purpose to life, he said (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). In fact, God will judge everything we do, whether in public or in secret, and hold us accountable to it, he said. Now that God has come in the flesh, testified to the whole world concerning His love and goodness toward us, and returned to His throne, how could we possibly expect or even desire another way? Can we crucify the Son again and again, or by continuing in sin do we hold His one-time sacrifice in contempt (Hebrews 6:6)? King David, Solomon's father, saw this day coming when he wrote: "Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate His rule with trembling. Kiss His Son, or He will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Psalm 2:11-12). Yes, we ought to take refuge in Yeshua, but in so doing, we have to surrender our lives to His care and forsake our own path. The King does not accept the kisses of those who betray Him. Too many praise the Son in His throne room, but reject His judgments when they don't think He's looking. This path leads to destruction, and I'm going to get specific in a moment. The Apostle James explains, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" The demons know God exists, and they even testify about the Son. Just look at all of the examples in the Gospels and the Book of Acts. In Matthew 8:29, for instance, the demons proclaim, "What do we have to do with you, Yeshua, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" These beings have no doubts concerning the LORD's identity, and yet they have completely disregarded His will. We can't give lip service to Yeshua but practice the whims of our own hearts, trust in the precepts of other men, or embrace a counterfeit spirit that simply doesn't measure up to our authentic God. To inherit the

Kingdom of Heaven, we must pursue the will of the Father in every aspect of our lives (Matthew 7:21-23).

As I ponder these truths in the world today, it's very easy to rail against the depravity we see all round us—the idolatry, the reliance on drugs and alcohol, the sexual immorality, the abuse of children, and all the other societal ills that move against God's will and His people in almost every environment, but we can't say we weren't warned. Yeshua said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). When we put our trust in Yeshua and follow Him in all His ways, we can be at peace, no matter what is going on around us, and we need to adhere to His peace. It's incumbent on us to simply stay the course, which is to fulfill the Word of the LORD, because He reigns. He explained in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." When we trust in the LORD, He's going to put people in our path who are looking for Truth. It is up to us to share it with them, to explain how Yeshua is still the best news the world has ever known, and He always will be. Then, it's our duty to train them up to obey the LORD according to His commandments as we too are being sanctified by this Truth.

We are sure to encounter resistance as we go out to do this, and here's where I want to press in on you. To share the good news of our salvation in Yeshua, we first have to explain what we are being saved from. Many Christians want to shy away from this part, and that may be the biggest reason so many are falling away from the faith or coming in to an inauthentic faith that is failing to prepare God's people for the harder times to come. Listen to what Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the days preceding Messiah's return. He said in 2 Timothy 3:1-5: "know this ... in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" Not only does this sound like the present day, it also concerns me that it seems to describe many people who have called themselves Christians. This is hard to deal with internally, but we have to continue to press in with trust in our Messiah, who said He would never leave us nor forsake us. In order to truly follow Messiah Yeshua, we have to love God by obeying His commandments and love one another by teaching those commandments to them, especially when they're going astray from them. We ought to consider others in higher esteem than ourselves, exercising humility and accepting responsibility for our words and actions. We ought to speak honorably with others and exercise gentleness and patience with those we are teaching, even when they speak falsely. But we must correct their errors and fallacies, while exercising patience and kindness, relying fully on the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us. It is important for us to strive for holiness, defined by God's Word, for the LORD is holy, and we ought to boldly stand strong for the Truth of God's Word without compromise while we also avoid creating stumbling blocks for those whose hearts desire to follow the LORD. We ought to read the Word of God each and every day and aspire to adhere to it in our lives, believing every good thing that the LORD has taught us and therefore putting it into practice for ourselves but also as an example for others. Finally, we ought to be on the lookout for wolves in sheep's clothing, those folks who might say they're Christians but do the things that Paul warned Timothy about. Paul didn't parse words: We need to stay away from such people. There is

a time when we must “pray for those who persecute us and spitefully use us,” but we also have to guard our ministries and missions from such people so they do not infect our work with sin and ultimately death.

Following a Biblical course of action will absolutely bring resistance, particularly as the end approaches. This is why we ought to meet to encourage one another and develop strategies for dealing with new scenarios as they come up. Peter asks in 1 Peter 3:13, “And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?” Paul answered that question in 2 Timothy 3, which we just covered. Again, it is good to avoid people who seek to harm our efforts, especially if they call themselves Christian. And yet, these same people need to be called to account, and so we can't ignore them. Yeshua said we should go out “as wise as serpents and harmless as doves,” but in so doing this, we ought to prepare our hearts to suffer hardship for the cause of Messiah. As Peter continues, He explains, “Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the LORD God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Messiah may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Peter 3:13-17). Remember, the LORD has said we cannot put our lamps under a table so that no one can see the light of God that is in us; rather, we must put them on the lamp stand as a witness to those around us.

And that brings me to one final point I want to make today, particularly pertaining to the rest of our weekly reading as we move into Leviticus 18. The LORD is quite adamant in His instruction, when He said through Moses: “According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 18:3-5). It is through the “righteousness of faith” in Yeshua, Paul writes in Romans 10, which we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart, that we ought to live by the commandments of God. When we confess Yeshua is LORD and that God's power has raised Him from the dead, we are saved, he notes in Romans 10:9, as we spoke about earlier. But we should not be thrown off by such a teaching to think Paul is discrediting Moses's Truth, that “the man who does those things [according to the law] shall live by them.”

And Paul clarifies what he means multiple times in His epistles, but most notably in Romans 3:31, where he explains that as Christians governed by faith, we literally “establish the law” in our lives. In other words, the law ought to be something that our heart desires to keep on account of our faith in Messiah, and it ought to describe the lives we actually live. It becomes clear that we are not saved to continue walking in the sins of the people of the world, represented by Egypt and Canaan in the verses from Leviticus 18, but we are saved to confess our sins, to repent from them, and to walk in the newness of life. Similarly, the Apostle John wrote, “Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.” So far, this sounds a lot like Paul's statement that we are saved by our faith in Messiah, but then He explains further: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John

5:1-3). In other words, we show that we truly love God and put Messiah Yeshua first in our lives when we walk away from our own way of living and walk instead according to the commandments of God, but not only this, we also show that we love other people around us when we keep the commandments of God and teach others to do so also. Yeshua said such people would be called "great" in the Kingdom of God, as recorded in Matthew 5.

In the rest of Leviticus 18, the LORD explained that we ought not sleep with our relatives, commit adultery, or participate in homosexuality, bestiality, or even polygamy. The LORD continued to list additional prohibitions for our own good as we read on into later chapters of Leviticus. Later, when Moses preached these same laws again to the second generation of Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land, he added a few things not previously mentioned. One such relevant example comes in Deuteronomy 22:5, where we read: "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God." It's interesting to note how Paul did not leave this prohibition out of his teaching to the Corinthians, but included it with full force. In 1 Corinthians 11:4, he wrote: "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head." In the first century culture, only women wore head coverings during prayer in Christian communities. There are other deeper spiritual meanings implied here, but the facts for today's purposes are straightforward: Paul spent a lot of his time teaching Torah to his Gentile disciples, and we ought to take note of this as many Christians attempt to misuse or dismiss the teachings of Torah.

Consider 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 as another example. There we read: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Yeshua and by the Spirit of our God." His point, in continuing, is not that our justification in Messiah gives us license to do anything we want, but rather that we ought to be focusing our attention on pleasing our LORD and savior. That means that our hearts ought to throw off sexual immorality or anything else that defiles our bodies or even reflects negatively on our lives when held up against the Torah. Paul concludes the section, "You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." In other words, Yeshua gave His life—His body and blood—so we who put our trust in Him can be saved, and so we ought not squander this great gift by living in sin. Rather, we ought to honor Messiah Yeshua and His sacrifice for us by seeking His righteousness in everything we say and do.

While many of the sins in Paul's list can be found prohibited in detail directly within Leviticus, there's one particular sin that ties us back into the beginning of today's message that I want to highlight. He writes, "idolators" will not inherit the kingdom of God. In the case of Nadab and Abihu, they had offered "profane fire," or "strange fire" before the LORD in His tabernacle, and if you remember from the story, God struck them dead on the spot and then instituted Yom Kippur in the wake of this to set apart the Holy of Holies in His tabernacle from anyone except the High Priest. What did they do that was so serious? The word "profane" or "strange" here is "zur (זֹרֵר)" in Hebrew, which means to be a stranger. Looking at Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, it means "to come from another place," "to be a foreigner," or "to turn aside." It even can imply "adultery" in certain uses. The bottom line is this: Nadab and Abihu were bringing in foreign worship of some kind into the Tabernacle of Meeting, and God would not and will not share His

altar with any tradition used to honor another god. We ought to take note of this, for Paul very clearly addresses this same issue in 2 Corinthians 6.

Consider what He wrote in verses 14-18 there: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” As we draw near to the LORD as His adopted sons and daughters through our faith in Messiah Yeshua, it’s clear that we cannot bring our own practices or traditions into our prayers or worship. The LORD, who is now our High Priest who intercedes for us, still desires as He always has desired that we do things His way rather than our own way. He’d like us to be separate our thoughts and plans from the world and all the fleshly desires of the people of the world, so that we can put on His heart and mind and wait on His instruction. He wants us to teach His holiness to those who are new to the faith, and encourage those who are more mature to endure in it. He wants us to practice holiness and pursue Him the way He has instructed us in His Word. And not only that, when we come together on Shabbat or the other Holy Days to worship Yeshua, we ought to make sure that everyone among us is fully committed to drawing closer to Him with their whole heart. This is not a time to be indecisive or unauthentic—it is certainly not a time to be half-hearted. This is the time to be fully committed to growing closer with God; helping one another do the same, with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. As we rest in the Word of the LORD and in His Holy presence, relying fully on His sacrifice as our atonement with Him, we ought to be considering all the ways we might go out and do His will so we can continue to please Him and build an even closer relationship with Him. This is the time to strengthen our faithfulness, so when we face those in the world who might stand against us we are prepared to work through those struggles so we can find the wheat that is ripe for harvest as the LORD has asked. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Let’s add to their number. Shabbat shalom.