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Believer's Behavior in Relation to Ourselves

13: 4-9

Believer's behavior in relation to ourselves DIG: What do you learn here about sex in marriage? About sex outside of marriage? What personal qualities should believers demonstrate to each other? How is God's presence an antidote for discontentment (see verses 5-6)? Read 1 Tim 6:6-11. How can being discontent with what you have and desiring riches be a detriment to one's spiritual health and vitality? How are we to regard our leaders? Why? What strange teachings were particularly tempting to the Hebrews in their day?

REFLECT: Would you say you were a content person? Why or why not? In which of these five areas have you made the most progress this year: (a) providing hospitality? (b) caring for those suffering in their faith? (c) loving one another as brothers and sisters in Christ? (d) keeping your marriage strong? (e) staying free from the love of money? Which do you need to work on the most? In which of these five areas in your place of worship the strongest? Weakest?

The rabbis teach that God revealed much more to Moshe on Mount Sinai than was actually written down. This became known as the Oral Law (see the commentary on The Life of Christ, **to see link click [Ei](#) - The Oral Law**), passed on orally from generation to generation. Eventually, there were about 1,200 oral laws for every one of the 613 commandments in the Torah. Not only that, but the rabbis also elevated the Oral Law slightly above the Torah. They teach that "whoever obeys the Torah does a good thing, but whoever obeys the Oral Law does an even better thing." Not until 219 AD was a summary of **the Oral Law** compiled. When it was fully transcribed it was called **the Mishnah**. Much later, what was to be called **the Talmud**, was anchored to this body of legal rulings.

In addition, the opinions of the rabbis were compiled into **the Gemara**, a commentary on **the Mishnah**. This, too, became a part of the Talmud. Many Jews accepted these writings as authoritative and used them for spiritual and practical direction. The Messianic community that was the recipient of the letter to the Hebrews would have felt the influence of these rabbinical writings in competing for their attention.

Over the course of many centuries, little has changed in the Orthodox world. They still speak of *the rishonim* (first ones), the medieval Torah scholars, and refer to *the akharonim* (latter ones), the sages at the time of the Renaissance and afterwards. In the sixteenth century Rabbi Yosef Caro wrote his *Shulkhan Arukh* (Prepared Table), which has become a comprehensive resource for Jews desiring a complete Talmudic code governing everyday life.

There are gems to be found in these collective writings of the Hebrew people. Pithy, philosophical sayings abound, "The rose grows among the thorns," "Commit a sin twice, it will seem like a sin no longer," "A single light answers as well for a hundred men as for one." There are also practical elements, "Use the noble vase today; tomorrow it may break," "Attend no auctions, if you don't have any money."

Yet for all of its wisdom and wit and sometimes whimsical elements, **the Talmud** presents no distinct ethical system. Nor does it offer any cohesive doctrine. What we do find, however, is the denial of such bedrock biblical doctrines as original sin, the vicarious atonement, and everlasting punishment. **The Talmud** portrays humans as the authors of their own salvation by works and whose spiritual life will continue to develop beyond the grave.³⁹³

Sexual purity: Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer (see the commentary on Deuteronomy [Br](#) - Do Not Commit Adultery) and all the sexual immoral. Ha'Shem is serious about sexual purity. Men and women may play around with illicit **sex**, and be totally acceptable in our contemporary society. But in the eyes of **the LORD**, it is always sin and will always be judged. Rabbi Sha'ul warns: **Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient (Ephesians 5:6).** He also tells us to **flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body (First Corinthians 6:18).** In other words, **sexual sin** is not only against **YHVH** and other people, it's also against ourselves. Part of our moral responsibility to ourselves is to be **sexually pure**.

Some of the more obvious results of such views are the heart-breaking increases in extramarital pregnancies, forcible rapes, illegitimate births (despite birth control measures and abortions), and venereal diseases of all sorts. Billy Graham once said that the writings coming out of contemporary authors are "like the drippings of a broken sewer". Judgment already exists in the broken homes, the psychological and physical breakdowns, and the murder and other violence that is generated when passion is uncontrolled. It is not possible

to live and act against the moral grain of the universe established by **the LORD Himself** and not suffer terrible consequences.³⁹⁴ **Sex** is like fire. It, has its place. Fire in your fireplace is a good thing. It can warm your house and cook your food. But fire in your kitchen is a bad thing. It can destroy your house and kill you and your family. **Sex** within the confines of marriage, however, is **God-ordained**. Therefore, **Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexual immoral (13:4).**

Satisfaction with what we have: Keep your lives free from the love of money (Hebrews 13:5a) because **it** is one of the most common forms of covetousness, since **money** can be used to secure so many other things that we want. **Loving money** is lusting after material riches, whatever the form is. Among other things, **loving money** is trusting in **uncertain wealth** rather than the living **God, who provides us with everything for our enjoyment (First Timothy 6:17)**. A believer should be free from such **love** of material things. Actually, **the love of money** is a sin against **YHVH**, a form of distrust. **For God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5b quoting Deuteronomy 31:6).**

Achan's **love of money** cost Isra'el a defeat at Ai, the lives of at least thirty-six of his fellow Israelites, his own life, and the lives of his family and flocks (**Joshua 7:1, 5, 25**). After Naaman was cleansed of leprosy, following Elisha's instruction to wash seven times in the Jordan, the prophet refused any payment. But Gehazi, Elisha's servant, later ran back to Naaman and deceived him in order to profit from the grateful captain. After lying again, he was cursed by Elisha with Naaman's leprosy (**Second Kings 5:15-27**). His greed led to lying, deceit, and leprosy. Judas was greedy as well as traitorous, willing to betray **Jesus** for thirty pieces of silver. Ananias and Sapphira paid for their greed and attempted deceit with their lives (**Acts 5:1-10**). Greed is not a trifling sin before **Ha'Shem**. It has kept many unbelievers out of the Kingdom, and it has caused many believers to lose the joy of the Kingdom or worse!

It is not wrong, of course, to earn or have wealth. It's what you do with it. Abraham and Job were extremely wealthy. The B'rit Chadashah mentions a number of faithful believers who had considerable wealth. It is **the love of money is a root of all kind of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (First Timothy 6:10)**. It is the longing after it and trusting in it that is sinful. David counseled: **Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them (Psalm 62:10b)**. Job stated this principle clearly: **If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, "You are my security," or if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune**

my hands had gained . . . then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high (Job 31:24-25, 28). To trust in **money** is to distrust **God**. Nicer clothes, a bigger house, another car, a better vacation could tempt us all. But **ADONAI** tells us to **be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5c).**

Many of those addressed in the book of **Hebrews** had lost most, if not everything they had. But they knew what they **possessed was better and would last forever (10:34 CJB).** Some of them might have been looking back to what they had lost and thought that the cost was too high. However, they are told not to return to material things. **Therefore, we can say with confidence, "ADONAI is my helper; I will not be afraid - what can mere mortals do to me" (Hebrews 13:6 quoting Psalm 118:6)? In Matthew 28:20, Yeshua made it clear: I am with you always, to the end of the age.**³⁹⁵



Steadfastness in the faith: Remember your leaders. The writer is still mindful of the danger that many of the Jewish recipients of this letter were in, that of renouncing their profession of faith in **Yeshua Messiah**, and returning to the Levitical sacrifices for their salvation. He therefore encourages them to **remember their leaders** who had been martyred. **Those had who spoken the word of God to you.** They were urged to **imitate their faith**, while **considering the outcome of their way of life (13:7).** Thus, they would be guarded against forsaking **Jesus Christ** and going back to the Temple sacrifices.³⁹⁶

Our author calls on us to focus on **Him** who is the sovereign unchanging source of salvation. **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (13:8).** As our hearts rejoice in **His** actions on our behalf we will continually acknowledge that **it is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace (13:9a).** We may really begin to realize the extent of **the Lord's grace** when we contemplate the depths of our sin and our total lack of righteousness

before **Ha'Shem** who **is a consuming fire (12:29)**. **Yeshua suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood (13:12)**. No other sacrifice was necessary. All we can really do is to gratefully **offer God a sacrifice of praise** for what **He** has done **(13:15) for God is well pleased with such "sacrifices" (13:16)**.

Yet the rabbis teach that with respect to the atonement, and their interpretation of Isaiah 53, is that the Jewish people themselves are the redeeming sacrifice (see the commentary on **Isaiah Iy - The Death of the Suffering Servant**). **The Talmud states that "the death of the righteous of the TaNaKh makes atonement" for others (Leviticus Rabbah, 20:7).**

But were the people of Isra'el righteous? **Isaiah** knew that **his** people hardly qualified to be **God's suffering servant** for they were spiritually **deaf** and **blind (Isaiah 42:19)**. One doesn't need to hear too many synagogue readings of the Haftarah (the weekly readings taken from the prophets) to see how every bit of righteousness had been stripped from the Jewish people. There were more than a few Orthodox rabbis who, nevertheless, instructed those about to be executed at the Nazi death camps to see their forfeited lives as a fulfillment of **the Almighty's** plan to redeem a corrupt world through **His** people's death. Many sought the strength to embrace their death in prayer that **God** would use their lives as part of **His** redemptive plan. The following prayer was found attached to a coat of a dead child at Ravensbruck concentration camp.

***O Lord**, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us: Instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering: our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble. When our persecutors come to be judged by **You**, let all of these fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.*

This stirring, even heartbreaking prayer, and the sentiment behind it, shows how easy it is to **be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings**. And if, as the writer to the **Hebrews** says, that **it is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace (13:9a)**, if it is truly **grace**, we must acknowledge **ADONAI** as **the Author and Finisher** of our salvation. Therefore, it is vital that **God Himself** bear the full weight for the punishment of our sins. And this is precisely what the **Hebrew** members of the Messianic community to whom this letter was written were being encouraged to believe, that **Yeshua was God's one and only Son (John 3:16), reconciling the world to Himself (Second Corinthians 5:19)**.³⁹⁷

Many in the Messianic community continued to practice kosher eating habits even after being saved, not as a means of salvation, but as a part of their Jewish heritage. This is allowed because of their freedom in **Messiah**. However, the author warns them that **their strength comes from God's grace, not from rules about food, which don't help those who follow them (13:9 NLT)**. It is as if the author is saying, "Yes, your **food** can be kosher because of your freedom in **Christ** allows you to eat what you want, but don't confuse eating kosher with your salvation. You are saved through faith in **Yeshua**, not by works, not by the kind of **food** you eat."

Any relationship involves times of closeness and times of distance, and in a relationship with **God**, no matter how intimate, the pendulum will swing from one side to the other. So sometimes you will not *feel* close to **Him**. But the deepest level of worship is praising **God** when in spite of the pain, thanking **ADONAI** during a trial, trusting **the LORD** when tempted, surrendering while suffering, and loving **God** when your prayers seem like they are bouncing off of the ceiling. How do you intend to stay focused of **God** even when **He** feels distant? How do you praise **God** when you don't understand what's happening in your life and **ADONAI** is silent? You do what **Job** did.

Tell **God** exactly how you feel.

Focus on who **God** is - **His** unchanging nature **(13:8)**.

Trust **God** to keep **His** promises.

Remember what **God** has already done for you.³⁹⁸