

Upholding One Torah

Those Who Oppose Us Still Don't Get It!

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In January of this year, the Steering Committee of the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues released a position paper entitled “One Law Two Sticks.” I was not even aware of this position paper until July when someone asked if I was planning to respond to it. When I downloaded the position paper from the IAMCS website, I was shocked to discover that they had accused me of teaching an errant Gospel—they indict me with holding to salvation by works, that I teach “... a ‘gospel’ of obedience to law, the very antithesis of the true gospel.” Since Paul considered those who teach a false gospel to be accursed (Gal 1:8–9), the IAMCS accusation is of the gravest sort. What is more, I was surprised that they would have made such an accusation without at least confronting me first.

As a result, I decided to send a personal letter to each member of the IAMCS Steering Committee, offering excerpts from a number of my published works showing conclusively that I have always taught that the salvation of a sinner is the result of God’s sovereign and unmerited grace, received through faith and not gained by one’s own efforts or works. To date, I’ve not received one response, of any sort, from the men who comprise the Steering Committee of the IAMCS. They are: Frank Lowinger, David Chernoff, Charlie Kluge, Joel Liberman, Robert Solomon, Michael Stepakoff, and Michael Weygant. I’m still hoping that perhaps at least one of these leaders might be willing to respond to my letter and the requests contained therein.

Then, in his September 2014 Newsletter, Daniel Juster wrote an article entitled “The Danger of the Jewish Roots Movements” in which he takes a swipe at the “One Law” people. In the beginning of the article he mentions that he actually published a book by the title *Jewish Roots* (Destiny Image, 1995) but that since then, the so-called “Jewish Roots Movement” has spawned all manner of errant and even heretical teachings. Actually, I agree with him about the “Jewish/Hebrew Roots” movement spawning all sorts of crazy and false teachings and this is why I’ve never associated myself nor the work of TorahResource with this movement even if Juster lumps us in with them. He then goes on to list three primary “Mistaken Jewish Roots Teaching,” with One Torah heading the list. Here’s what he writes:

Error #1: that Gentile Christians are to keep the whole Law just like Jews

I have called this error “One Law” - from the verse in Numbers 15:16 often used to justify it. I wrote a paper specifically to address this. Incredibly, these folks try to explain away Acts 15 and Galatians. They claim that all are called to keep the Law in the same way. Of course this is not only contrary to many clear New Covenant texts but also ends in partial replacement theology since there is no longer any distinctive calling for Jews. Some make an exception for circumcision for Gentiles, while others amazingly find a way to even call for this. Galatians 5 is very clear that Gentiles are not called to covenant circumcision or they would be responsible for keeping the whole Torah. Paul is virtually shouting to them, “Don’t do it!” These same folks teach that Christians must strictly observe all the Biblical feast days and the weekly Sabbath. They have not been able to agree on a calendar system to assure that exactly the right day on the annual calendar can be known for each feast. In both Judaism and Christianity there has been much dispute on this.

After being made aware of Juster’s recent article, I thought to myself: “Baruch HaShem! We must be making headway if organizations like the IAMCS and Tikkun Ministries International feel the need to denounce our teaching publicly! Maybe the One Torah Revolution has finally begun!”

The IAMCS & Theological Misunderstanding

What is sad, however, is that those who are so opposed to the biblical teaching of One Torah seem to have basic theological misunderstandings. For instance, the IAMCS Steering Committee apparently fails to note the biblical distinction between justification and sanctification. Surely justification and sanctification are inextricably

bound together, the one always issuing in the other, but justification is the work of God alone, while sanctification is the cooperative work between God and the believer so that through the power of the Ruach, the believer becomes more and more like Yeshua in thought, word, and deed. Thus, in the “great commission” (Matt 28:19-20) Yeshua’s directive is to “make disciples,” not merely to hand out Gospel tracts. Surely making disciples must begin by first proclaiming the Gospel but it does not end there. For after a sinner confesses Yeshua as the risen Lord (Rom 10:9) and on the basis of Yeshua’s work is therefore declared righteous in the court of heaven, the process of sanctification begins. Yeshua’s instructions to “make disciples” envisions the whole process: the initial act of faith in Yeshua, resulting in justification, which then begins a new life of growing in faith and personal sanctification through the word of God energized by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh Who indwells the believer. Yeshua’s command, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” is the basic foundation for making disciples. In other words, teaching someone who has come to faith in Yeshua what it means to live in obedience to Him is to help that person become a true disciple of Yeshua. And what commandments did Yeshua teach His disciples to observe? Read Matt 5:17–20.

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:17–20)

So let’s put this together: at the end of Matthew’s Gospel we hear Yeshua telling the disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations by teaching them to observe all that He had commanded them. At the beginning of Matthew, Yeshua is teaching that anyone who annuls even the least of “these commandments” and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but the one who (literally) “does them and teaches *them* will be called great in the kingdom.” To which commandments is Yeshua referring? He tells us explicitly: “the Torah” and “the Prophets,” i.e., the commandments contained in the only inspired Bible of Yeshua’s day, the Tanach (Genesis–Malachi) and later affirmed by the Apostolic Scriptures (Matthew–Revelation).

Yeshua never taught that a sinner could gain right-standing before the Father by keeping the commandments! No, He taught that being righteous in the Father’s eyes could only be obtained through faith in the work He would do by giving His own life as payment for sin. But Yeshua’s Gospel was not simply announcing a “fire escape” from the Father’s wrath. He taught a Gospel that transforms—that takes the sinner from death to life—from being an enemy of God to becoming a child of His family, and thus becoming more and more conformed to the very image of the Son Himself.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (John 5:24)

For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:40)

He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’ (John 7:38)

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father. (John 14:12)

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. (John 15:10)

Paul taught the same Gospel because he was an Apostle of Yeshua. Consider Eph 2:8–10.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a

result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph 2:8–10)

Clearly, our salvation is by God’s grace received through faith, all of which is a gift of God and nothing that we could do ourselves. Yet our salvation is for a purpose, and that purpose is that we should glorify God by living a life of obedience—making “good works” the very pattern of life. In fact, this is the ultimate purpose of our salvation, that we might glorify God by living as His obedient children.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in the Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3–6)

And what are those “good works which were prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10)? They are the *mitzvot* which Yeshua came to establish and confirm so that the person who observes them and teaches others to observe them will be called great in the kingdom (Matt 5:19). They are the very commandments given to Yeshua’s disciples which they, in turn, were to teach those they disciple from the nations. They are not the means of salvation, but the result; not the root of the tree but the fruit.

Daniel Juster’s Theology

Karl Barth

As I read Daniel Juster’s recent Newsletter in which he singles out One Torah as “Jewish Roots Theological Error #1,” several things grabbed my attention. First was Juster’s assessment regarding Karl Barth. He writes:

Almost 50 years ago, the greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth, decried the fact that American theology had declined into paperback theology.

What? ... “the greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th century”? Seriously?! If Juster had referred to Barth as the “most influential theologian” or the “most prolific theological author” I might have agreed. But to dub Barth as the “greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th century” left me nonplused while at the same time giving me an insight into Juster’s own theology.

Barth waffled on the inspiration of the Scriptures. He did not believe the Scriptures were inspired in the text itself, but only in the immediate application of the text by the Spirit (*Dogmatics*, I/2 §19). This left the Scriptures open to individual subjectivism, stripping the sacred text of propositional, universal truth.

Relegating the meaning of the text to the subjective understanding of the reader led to another theological blunder: Barth’s insistence that the Bible contained error. In this regard he labeled the creation account of Genesis, the fall of Adam, as well as other biblical narratives as “saga.” For Barth, the Bible incorporated heroic stories which were not intended to relate actual history but were cultural sagas telling a story wrapped in imaginative fantasy (*Dogmatics*, III/1 §41.1).

In regard to the Gospel, while Barth is not an express universalist, his view of salvation certainly opened the door for universalism (that all mankind will eventually be saved and none will be lost eternally) in spite of the fact that universalism violates the plain statement of Scripture, for Yeshua Himself taught that some will be lost eternally (e.g., Matt 25:41). Moreover, in Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kueng’s book, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, he concluded that Barth’s view of justification and the Roman Catholic doctrine of infused righteousness were one and the same. Barth praised Kueng’s book in a letter to Kueng that was printed in the book itself.

I’ve mentioned a few of the most glaring problems in Barth’s theology, and there are others. But given Juster’s praise of Barth I can only surmise that he agrees with him in these matters or else he is ignorant of

Barth's actual theology and the fact that Barth's voluminous writings helped to undermine biblical truth in universities and seminaries worldwide.

One Torah is Error #1 of the Jewish Roots Movement

After shaking my head in disbelief over Juster's applause for Karl Barth, I sighed once again to see him repeat the same old mantra villainizing the biblical teaching of One Torah. He mentions a paper he wrote about this, a paper to which I responded, and the interested reader can find both at TorahResource.com (<http://www.torahresource.com/ConfrontingIssues.html>).

He attacks One Torah teaching with the same old rhetorical ammunition he has used in the past, but he needs to check his rounds: the rhetorical bullets he's using turn out to be blanks. In a passing comment he mentions Acts 15 and Galatians which he claims One Torah proponents "try to explain away." No, we've not attempted to explain anything away but rather have accepted the biblical text as inspired and carrying the original authors' intended meaning. We've not resorted to fanciful, allegorical, or anachronistic interpretive methods, but sought to understand the sacred text as the inspired, infallible word of God in which one passage does not contradict another but the whole presents the unified revelation of God's truth. Rather than explaining anything away, we've sought to handle the word of God accurately. You can find my comments on Acts 15 in the article "Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council" (<http://www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/Acts%2015.pdf>) and my full commentary on *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* is available at our online store (<http://store.torahresource.com/>).

Juster claims that One Torah theology is "contrary to many clear New Covenant texts." If that is the case, let him please supply the list, and since there are many such texts, this should be an easy task. He then goes to the argument that One Torah theology is akin to "replacement theology since there is no longer any distinctive calling for Jews." I'm never quite sure what Juster and those in his camp mean by a "distinctive calling for Jews." If one considers Paul's theological use of the verb "to call" and its corresponding noun "calling," one discovers that he is referring to salvation by faith in Yeshua. In fact, in Ephesians Paul goes to great lengths to explain that Jew and Gentile remain just that, Jew and Gentile, while at the same time becoming equal members of "the household of God" by faith in Yeshua. How more plain could Paul make this? Look at the terms he employs: "fellow citizens," "of God's household," "fitted together," "built together," "fellow heirs," "fellow members," and "fellow partakers." There is clearly no "bi-lateral ecclesiology" in Paul's theology! Indeed, listen to what Paul has to say about our calling:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:4-6)

Does this mean that Paul is teaching a "replacement theology"? Of course not! Paul teaches the reality, that Jews remain Jews and Gentiles remain Gentiles, but they are equal members of God's family because both are "in Messiah."

But our opponents will immediately ask: "How then are Jews identified as Jews if everyone in the body of Messiah is suppose to live in obedience to the Torah?" Well, apparently the early synagogues of The Way were not concerned about this, since history makes it clear that Gentiles who joined themselves to God through faith in Yeshua were treated as Jews by the Roman government, being assessed the "Jewish tax" (*fiscus judaicus*) the same as Jewish members. The point is this: from an inside perspective, Jew and Gentile retained their distinctive ethnic identities to the glory of God, for as Jew and Gentile are united as one through being "in Messiah," the faithfulness of God to the Abrahamic promise is affirmed: "And in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (cf. Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). But to the outsider, the people of The Way were viewed as one. Is this not the same way that Egypt looked at Israel when God brought them out as a mixed multitude? Were not native born and foreigner viewed as one nation at Sinai? Please understand: Jewish and non-Jewish identity is necessary in order for God to prove His faithfulness that "in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed." So in the body of Messiah there are Jews and non-Jews and this reality must be affirmed and maintained. But such distinction is not based upon lifestyle, for all who are in Messiah are to be like Him.

Is this not the very picture given to us by Isaiah as he prophecies regarding the Messianic age?

Also the foreigners (*b'nei haneicher*) who join themselves to Adonai, to minister to Him, and to love the name of Adonai, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath and holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. (Is 56:6–7)

Note carefully that Isaiah speaks of the *b'nei haneicher*, “the foreigners,” using a term which marks them out as having come from outside of Israel. And please, do not suggest that these are “converts to Judaism”! First, there is not even a hint in the Scriptures that God offers a way for a Gentile to be given Jewish status. In fact, the whole ritual of conversion to Judaism is a man-made ceremony, pure and simple. Second, there is not even a scrap of evidence that this man-made ritual of conversion to Judaism existed before the time of the Maccabees. To interpret the Hebrew word *ger* or *nochri* when encountered in the Torah as a “convert to Judaism” or a “proselyte” is therefore a gross anachronism.

What we see in Is 56 is that the foreigner has joined himself “to Adonai,” and as a result, he or she is a covenant member, a covenant of which the Shabbat is the covenant sign. This, then, is clearly the Sinai covenant, the covenant of the Torah. And Isaiah’s words, repeated by Yeshua Himself (Matt 21:13), that “My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples” surely is foundational for Paul’s theology of the one family of God made up of Jew and Gentile (Eph 2–3) as well as his Olive Tree illustration in which the natural and wild engrafted branches bear the same fruit because they are nurtured by the same rich root (Rom 11).

Juster ends his short salvo by noting that Paul forbade Gentiles to be circumcised. This notion, once again, is a misreading of Paul. For if such were the correct reading, then one would need to explain why Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16) since by all available historical records, Timothy (having a Gentile father and a Jewish mother) would have been reckoned as a Gentile and not a Jew in the late 2nd Temple period (see my *Paul, the Letter Writer*, 2nd edition, pp. 107–108). Actually what Paul is forbidding in his Epistle to the Galatians is for Gentiles to undergo the ritual of conversion in order to gain legal, Jewish status (i.e., become a “proselyte”) with the belief that doing so would gain them a righteous standing before God which they could not obtain otherwise.

Of the many issues I have with those who oppose the biblical teaching of One Torah, there is one which continues to puzzle me and about which I’ve never been given an answer. This is the issue proposed by the “Divine Invitation” perspective. If Gentiles are “invited by God” to keep the Torah even if they are not required to do so (since they are not Jewish), would not Juster consider this to foster a “partial replacement theology” as well? If a Gentile decides to accept the “invitation” and seeks to be “fully Torah observant,” would he not then be “mistaken” for a Jew by those who observe his lifestyle and thus contribute to the erosion of genuine Jewish identity? It seems to me that if Juster and those who agree with him want clear and distinct “Jewish identity” based upon who keeps Torah and who does not, then they would need to adopt the stance of rabbinic Judaism which forbids Gentiles to keep certain parts of the Torah. Instead of just stating that the Torah is only for Jews, they should be forthright and teach that Gentiles are forbidden to keep Torah. After all, the rabbinic halachah teaches that a Gentile who keeps Shabbat is worthy of death (Mid. Rab. *Deut* 1.21)! So if they think that a Gentile who keeps Torah is fostering replacement theology, they should state it boldly and, to be consistent, require the Gentiles who attend their Messianic synagogues to return to the Christian Church in order to guard them from promoting the heresy of Supersessionism.

Dear reader: Are you one of our Gentile brothers or sisters in Yeshua who have come to love God’s Torah but are made to feel like a second-class citizen or told that there are parts of the Torah which are not for you because you’re not Jewish? Please, let your voice be heard to the glory of God! Join us as we boldly proclaim the truth of God’s eternal and unchanging word. Be part of the One Torah Revolution!

Summary

In reality, what drives the anti-One Torah people is their fear of losing Jewish identity, not their strong alle-

giance to the Scriptures. Don't misunderstand me: Jewish identity is important, and so is non-Jewish identity, for it is only when the two distinct entities come together as one in Messiah that God's faithfulness to His covenant promises are fully displayed before a watching world. But God has promised that Jewish identity would never be erased, and it seems to me that our goal as followers of Yeshua ought to be to enhance Jewish identity by being living testimonies of God's faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that is, by living out the reality of Paul's Olive Tree metaphor in which both natural and wild olive branches are inextricably united by faith in Yeshua and therefore strive to live out lives of obedience to His commandments. This is the true heart and message of One Torah.