FIRST STEPS IN MESSIANIC JEWISH ETHICS

by Carl Kinbar

In this paper, I propose a Messianic Jewish ethics that is based on our obligation to love. It is shaped by the mitzvot of Torah and Messiah which command us to love and also enlarge our capacity to love. The foundation of Messianic Jewish ethics consists, first of all, of two primary ethical mitzvot: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) and Yeshua's "new mitzvah", "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). I attempt to forge an understanding of these mitzvot in their biblical contexts, in Yeshua's teaching, and in light of selected Jewish and Christian interpretation.

The mitzvah "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" is one of the most well known sentences of the Bible. I lost count of how many times I heard or saw these words since I accepted the invitation to write this paper. Yet these words are also among the most misunderstood in the Bible. I will argue that in the context of Torah and Yeshua's teaching, "love your neighbor does not mean "love all humanity" but "love your [Jewish] neighbor." This understanding of the word "neighbor" is as essential to Messianic Jewish ethics as the meaning of "Israel" – the Jewish people – is to Messianic Jewish theology.

Throughout the paper, my concern is not only to describe the first steps in Messianic Jewish ethics but to explore how mitzvot challenge us to lead ethical lives and engage in heroic ethical actions when they are required. I also want to show the two mizvot are relevant to an ethical challenge that our community has faced for years now: how to live out our dual

commitment to the Jewish people and the ekklesia (the Church drawn from the nations) and therefore how Jews and Gentiles relate in Messianic Jewish congregations.

I use the word "obligation" to describe the ethical thrust of the mitzvot. In biblical terms, mitzvot are not recommendations concerning desirable and undesirable actions. It describes ways in which we are obligated to express devotion to God and promote the wellbeing of others. In the Torah, the obligations of one Jew to another are delineated in the mitzvot and summed up in the mitzvah "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Messiah Yeshua did not come to set Jews free from the mitzvot but to fulfill them; whatever else Yeshua was in is, he is a Jewish man who expressed devotion to God and promoted the wellbeing of the community flawlessly according to the Torah. Likewise, Yeshua's new mitzvah, "Love one another as I have loved you," which obligated his Jewish disciples to promote one another's wellbeing in certain ways. The apostles applied these obligations to all subsequent disciples, both Jew and Gentile, developing a body of halakhic principles that shape the way members of the ekklesia should relate, especially in their congregations.

I regret that I am not also able to discuss our obligations to all humanity, which are implicit in the fact that all humans beings are made in the image of God,[1] or to the entire created order of sentient beings and the environment, which are the stewardship of all humanity.[2] Paul Saal addressed these through example in his 2005 Hashivenu Forum paper[3] and Russ Resnick

[1] See Ira F. Stone, *A Responsible Life*. (New York: Aviv Press, 2006),11-17 and David Horwitz, "The Fundamental Principle of Torah." Online: http://www.yutorah.org/togo/shavuot/articles/Shavuot_To-Go_-_5769_Rabbi_Horwitz.pdf.

[2] Some useful resources can be found at http://www.jewishveg.com/index.html, http://www.canfeinesharim.org, and http://coejl.org.

[3] "Toward a Messianic Jewish Moral Vision." (paper presented at the Hashivenu Forum, Pasadena, CA, 2005).

touched on several issues yesterday, but definition of their foundational ideas remains a necessity.

1

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

Leviticus 19 concerns the holiness that God requires of the people of Israel. It opens with the shattering imperative, "You shall be holy for I, Hashem your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2),[4] followed by a collection about fifty mitzvot – positive and negative, ethical and ritual –meant to form and sustain a holy community by means of exclusive devotion to God and ethical treatment of all members of society. The thought underlying the chapter is that God makes his people holy by means of mitzvot as Israel observes them with appropriate inclinations of the heart.

The mitzvah "love your neighbor as yourself" occupies an unassuming place at the end of a section (verses 9-18) that conveys a strong sense of the whole chapter. The section begins with the requirement that Israel leave the corners of the field and its gleanings for the needy and the resident foreigner (Heb., *ger*). Jews shall not steal, deal falsely, or lie to one another and, especially, not profane God's name by using it in a false oath. Jews shall not oppress or rob their neighbor, curse the deaf man or put a stumbling block before the blind – that is, they shall not defraud, mock, or play malicious pranks on vulnerable members of the community. They shall love the resident foreigner as themselves.[5] The last four verses of this section are worth quoting in full in order to understand what the Torah means by the word "neighbor" (Heb. *re'a*).

[4] Translations are adapted from the New American Standard Bible.

[5] For comments on this mitzvah, see the Appendix, 36.

[15] *'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to* ***the poor*** *nor defer to* ***the great****,*
but you are to judge ***your neighbor*** *fairly.*

[16] *You shall not go about as a slanderer among* ***your people****,*
and you are not to act against the life of ***your neighbor****; I am Hashem.*

[17] *'You shall not hate* ***your fellow countryman*** *in your heart;*
you may surely reprove ***your neighbor****, but shall not incur sin because of him.*

[18] *You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against* ***one of your people****,*
but you shall love ***your neighbor*** *as yourself; I am the Hashem.*(Lev. 19:15-18)

Each verse includes a parallelism, equating the first term – *the poor* and *the great*, *your people*, *your fellow countryman*, or *one of your people* – with *your neighbor*. In the context of Leviticus 19 and the Torah, all these terms refer to the people of Israel; in today's terms, *your neighbor* can only mean *your* [Jewish] *neighbor*.

What does it mean to love one's neighbor? Claudio Gianotto[6] comments

> If love is the object of a precept, this means that it is not primarily conceived here as a sentiment, an inner attitude, but rather as a model of behavior, resulting in a series of actions. It is in this sense that it is parsed in Deuteronomy: to love the stranger residing in the land means providing him or her with food and clothing (Deut 10:18-19); to love God means putting the divine commandments into practice (Deut 11:1)."

I agree with Gianotto that love is not mere sentiment; however the common claim that the Torah is interested only in actions and practices but not in the inner life is simply wrong, as this passage shows. Verse 17 begins with the mitzvah "You shall not to hate your fellow countryman in your heart," requiring Jews to deal with inner hostility that leads to revenge and sustains itself by bearing grudges, which is also a matter of the heart. The thought is reversed at the end of verse 18, where "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" is the complement of "You shall not

[6] Claudio Gianotto, "The Lucan Parable of the Good Samaritan and Its interpretations in Christian Antiquity in Katell Berthelet." Pages 125-138 in *The Quest for a Common Humanity: Human Dignity and Otherness in the Religious Traditions of the Mediterranean* (ed. Katell Berthelet and Matthias Morgenstern; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 127.

hate." Love, like hate, is "in the heart." It suppresses inner hostility, and cultivates the inclination to favor one's neighbor; love therefore does good instead of taking vengeance and is empathetic instead of bearing a grudge. The Torah can no more be reduced to proper actions than the besorah can be reduced to attitudes of the heart; biblical piety and the best of Judaism and Christianity have always paid attention to actions *and* matters of the heart.

But who is "your neighbor"? In the Torah, "neighbor" has a range of meaning including friend, neighbor, associate, companion, and lover, depending on the context. Michael Fagenblat, writing in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, observes that in its Leviticus 19 context, "as in later Jewish interpretation, the commandment to 'love your neighbor' is restricted to members of the covenant community. . . . *rea* refers to a person encountered within the framework of covenant relationships."[7]

In the context of the passage, the concluding mitzvah means "You shall love your [Jewish] neighbor as yourself." If the sentence is removed from its context, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" becomes a proverb without reference points and virtually demands a generic reading like, "You shall love [whoever happens to be] your neighbor." In Part 2, I will explore Yeshua's teaching on this mitzvah and show that he retains the plain sense, contextual reading of Leviticus 19:18.

The measure of love is "as yourself" (Heb. *kamokha*); it refers to the degree of love, not the specifics of behavior, since those are given in Torah and worked out in tradition.[8] In other

[7] Michael Fagenblat, "The Concept of Neighbor in Jewish and Christian Ethics." Pages 540-43 in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 451.

[8] The details of ethical behavior are not fully explained in terms of the word "love" or even its associated mitzvot; they must be further developed in tradition. Alisdair MacIntyre writes, "A tradition is

words, just because I buy myself an iPad, does not obligate me to buy one for you. But I need to share my resources – time, money, etc. – according to the Torah and community traditions and go the extra mile for you personally if you are in need in any way that I can help. I will look at this more in the section on the Good Samaritan.

To love another "as yourself" is not a command to love ourselves: it assumes that you already do, that you normally act in your own interest, as best you understand it. You make sure, if possible, that yur basic needs are taken care of – a place to live, something to eat, etc. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is also a hierarchy of motivations. Acting from a motivation of self-interest is not "selfishness" or "sinful" in itself; it is *implied* in the mitzvah and the mitzvah states outright that "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" – that is, to seek her good as you seek your own, particularly when she is in need. Hillel the elder, who probably died not long before Yeshua's birth, famously put it this way: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But when I am [only] for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" (Mishnah Avot 1.14). Loving myself is being "*for* myself" and loving my neighbor means being *for* my neighbor as I *am for* myself. The *k* in *kamokha* means "as" or "like." It indicates that you love for your neighbor must *correspond* to your love for yourself – the two must look like each other – grammatically, it does not require exact equivalency. Under normal circumstances, a Jew is not required to take care of his neighbor's every need as he takes care of his own; that would be equivalence and, if anything, it is the responsibility of the community. An individual Jew should take full responsibility for another Jew only under extreme circumstances; yet, the mitzvah requires that we be ready for such circumstances.

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an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined" (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, 12). For MacIntyre, this is a rational process in those who inhabit the tradition seek to develop norms and continually review them, rationally considering any internal or external challenges to these norms.

To understand the mitzvah, we need to see it in the context of Torah, which shapes the community that is called to holiness. Loving one's Jewish neighbor is the most important ethical mitzvah in this regard. All members of the community are obligated to love their neighbor and all members are loved this way, at least ideally. By defining "neighbor" as "[whoever happens to be] our neighbor" or "all humanity," we fail to account for the reciprocity that exists between members of the Jewish people. In the Torah, love is seen as a responsibility, a benefit, and in a sense the glue that binds the community together. Love, as envisioned by the Torah, functions fully only within a community of mutual obligation.

In Torah context, loving one's neighbor potentially helps free Jews from hatred and vengeance because it does not require them to overlook injustice, much less wickedness. The offender and the offended are both subject to the same Torah; if one defrauds another, the offended party may take advantage of the Torah's civil remedies. It is notable that in Jewish tradition, even convicted murderers are to be treated decency so that their dignity as human beings is not compromised. Where such remedies do not exist and the "neighbor" continues to act hatefully or destructively, it becomes more difficult to obey the imperative not to hate but to love. At times, there is so little provision for justice in a community that it takes virtually heroic action to move from hatred and bearing grudges to decency and love.

The nature of loving one's neighbor in community context is exemplified by the Torah's mitzvot concerning the poor. Jews are obligated to care for the poor in very specific ways, not simply as an individual effort but as part of a community's effort. In Torah terms, if *all* Jews do not fulfill their poor-tithe commitments and fail to reserve the field corner and gleanings for the

poor, the poor suffer and the community shows itself to be far from the holiness that God requires.[9]

Ira F. Stone, a Conservative rabbi, challenges the idea that the word "neighbor" means "[Jewish] neighbor." In *A Responsible Life*,[10] He claims that since *re'a* (which we translate "neighbor" in this passage) is derived from the same root as "shepherding," the "definition of 'my neighbor' thus might be: the person for whom I am responsible."[11] Stone is not concerned with the meaning of "neighbor" in its Leviticus 19 context or the fact that Biblical Hebrew dictionaries and lexicons do not list his meaning because for him the meaning of "neighbor" is not stable; its meaning "is never definitive, but rather evolving."[12] Stone continues, "The one who is closest to us, literally our beloved, is our first neighbor. But the very experience of such a responsibility itself increases our need for such responsibility, driving the list outward to include family, friends, ethnic and national affinities, and, ideally, ultimately all of humanity and all of creation."[13]

Stone's definition has a certain appeal: it loosens the word "neighbor" from the narrow constraints of the Torah and stable meaning and makes it universal in scope. Stone's approach is based on a well-articulated theology that is representative of many contemporary liberal Jewish[14] and Christian thinkers. First, Stone does not believe that God revealed the Torah at Sinai; in fact, he asserts elsewhere that anyone "believing in the literal descriptions of events in the bible

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[9] After the failed Bar Kochba revolt of 132-135 C.E., there remained no mechanism to collect the poor-tithe but the obligation remained (for produce grown in the Land of Israel) and has been met in other ways. See "Maaser Ani." Online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maaser_Ani.

[10] New York: Aviv Press, 2006.

[11] Ibid., 25.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 26.

[14] I discuss what is perhaps the earliest example in the Appendix, 37-38.

[including the giving of the Torah on Sinai] is a simpleton. . . . [T]he story of Sinai and God's appearance there is precisely a story, but a story intended to convey hard won insights into the nature of life and its meaning."[15] The story can tell us nothing about God or what God wishes to reveal to Israel; there are no mitzvot as we understand them (that is, as divine mandates), only human "insights forged out of centuries of difficult speculation" and put into story form for easy transmission and suitability for readers of every age and intellectual capacity.[16]

In the absence of the knowledge of God and what God might wish to say to us, Stone claims that "theology for Jews can only be religious anthropology,"[17] the study of human religious experience. While Stone acknowledges that "our experience recorded in Scripture . . . derives from God's perspective,"[18] it remains our experience, not God's. As our experience changes, our perception of God and the written story changes. Thus, "neighbor" ultimately refers to "all of humanity and all of creation."

One of the problems with this approach is that Stone is not actually engaging in religious anthropology. The first task of any anthropology is to identify the group being studied. One might think that Stone is describing the experience of Jews; actually, he is describing the experience of people, including Jews, who believe that "our" experience is the only thing we can know about God. Everyone else is excluded – the Orthodox experience of God is irrelevant and the agnostic's lack of such experience is not taken into account. I would define the subject of Stone's "religious anthropology" as those who share Stone's presuppositions about God, Israel,

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[15] Ira F. Stone, "High Holiday Sermons; Rosh Hashanah – Day 2." Online: http://www.phillymussar.org/pdfs/RoshHashanah2_5766.pdf.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Stone, *A Responsible Life*, 111.

[18] Ibid., 112.

and the Torah." Studying a group like that would be valid – I would like to do it myself. But Stone should have said, "For Jews like me, the only theology is religious anthropology of people who think like me." This, it is claimed, is superior to a "literal" reading of the Bible (Stone does not examine intermediate approaches).

It should come as no surprise that for Stone the definition of "Jew" has changed as well. Whoever "welcomes the wakefulness of responsibility . . . is a Jew—or better, the distinction between Jew and non-Jew is moot."[19] Ultimately, Stone's book is valuable because it explains Mussar practice and introduces us to work of the early Mussar master Rav Simcha Zissel. But its theological basis and it use of Hebrew terms is deeply flawed.

I am addressing the basic ethical issue of loving one's fellow Jew in the context of the mitzvot and the Jewish people; such love should be regular and ongoing according to the mitzvot, and is reciprocal. At the same time, all human beings are made in the image of God: no one is worth the slightest bit more or less than any other. We intervene individually and as a community to help human beings in distress. Messianic Jews who are called and devoted to helping non-Jews in distress bring merit before God and credit before humanity. As I will explore in the Part 3, Jewish and Gentile Yeshua-believers are also deeply obligated to one another because we are bound together in Messiah. In general, though, our obligation to all humanity is not regular and reciprocal because we are not bound together with all humanity in that way. This is one reason why changing the mitzvah to "love all humanity as yourself" is, if

[19] Ibid., 100. Stone then asserts that "we believe that there is a mysteriously and particularistic love recorded in the Torah . . . [which] has been the guiding force in shaping our culture, etc." I am not at all sure that this sense of "a mysteriously and particularistic love" is part of the experience of Jews that Stone represents and, if not, it should not have a place within his theology. (Ibid., 101)

taken seriously, destructive to Jewish life: there would be no ethical or halakhic grounds to prioritize relationships with fellow Jews or form Jewish congregations or communities.

2

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

As we move to Yeshua's teaching on "love your neighbor as yourself," we will be drawn back to its context in Leviticus 19 and the Torah. This is because Yeshua did not re-define words of the Torah according to his religious experience; he studied the Torah, grasped its essence and details, and explained the Torah as its master interpreter.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua taught his disciples and the crowd that had gathered in Galilee from around the Land.[20] Like "love your neighbor," Yeshua's "love your enemies" are among the most well known words in the Bible. .

> You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt. 5:43-44)

According to Gianotto, the first known Christian interpretation of this passage was authored by Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c. 215) who claimed that "Jesus puts no limitation on the concept of 'neighbor,' in contradistinction to the Jews, who on the contrary have introduced limitations that are either ethnic (blood kinship, membership in the people of Israel) or religious (proselytes status, circumcision, observance of the Mosaic law)."[21] More than thirteen centuries later, John Calvin (1509-1564) was even more emphatic: "nothing is more obvious or certain

[20] See Matt. 4:25; 5:1-2; 7:28.

[21] Gianotto, 134.

than that God, in speaking of our neighbors, includes the whole human race."[22] In other words, Clement and Calvin claimed that Yeshua restored the original meaning of "neighbor." This approach lost some credibility as Christian religious scholars began to read Leviticus 19:18 more contextually. It is now far more common to find the claim that Yeshua *altered* the meaning of "neighbor." As contemporary Christian scholar Albert Nolan writes, "Jesus extended one's neighbor to include one's enemies. He could not have found a more effective way of shocking his audience into the realization that he wished to include all men in the solidarity of love," [23] (In my opinion, it would have been far more effective for him to say outright that all humanity is now included. That is, if that is what he wanted to say.)

These approaches – that "neighbor" means "all humanity" in its original context or that Yeshua altered its meaning – are distinct but they are in full agreement that there is now no mitzvah that obligates Jews to love their Jewish neighbor; Jews are simply part of humanity. The word "love" is no longer understood in terms of the Torah's mitzvot or in the context of the community created by the Torah. Love of neighbor has been completely stripped of its context and become subject to religious and cultural imagination. Thus, when the average person, the average Christian, or the average Messianic Jew hears the common saying "love your neighbor as yourself" we do not think of its place in Torah and among the Jewish people! Needless to say, this presents a major problem for Jews for whom Ahavat Yisrael ("Love of all Jews") is a basic and essential Torah-based commitment. I am not suggesting that Messianic Jews cannot or do not love our fellow Jews. However, when Ahavat Yisrael is based on anything other than a mitzvah of the Torah, it becomes critically weakened.

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[22] John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew*. Online: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31.ix.li.html.

[23] Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 40.

The meaning of Yeshua's teaching depends on the identity of the "enemy" that Yeshua taught his disciples to love. The consensus Christian interpretation rests in one way or another on the assumption that the "enemy" consists of the Jews' political (such as the Romans), ethnic (the Gentiles), and personal enemies. Someone was teaching Jews to hate them. There is no record that that any group named in the Besorot (the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, etc.) ever taught Jews to "hate your enemy" or anything similar to it; yet, until recently, interpreters simply assumed or imagined that one or more of these groups must be responsible for this teaching. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) in 1946-56 and their gradual publication, some commentators have noted that the scrolls include a number of teachings that resemble "hate your enemy."[24] However, a close reading of the texts does not support the notion that sectarians taught their members to hate political, ethnic, or personal enemies.

Yudit Kornberg Greenberg writes, "Love and hatred are intimately bound up in the deterministic, dualistic theology of Qumran sectarian texts. . . The sectarian is to love what God loves and hate what God hates. The sectarian is even commanded to despise those outside of the sect."[25] By "those outside of the sect," Greenberg mean Jews outside of the sect. In the Community Rule, for example, "Instructors" are told to "separate and weigh" community members with the goal of removing "men of the pit . . . men of sin" (1 QS 9.12, 17).[26] It is said of the Instructor, "And thus shall be his love and thus shall be his hatred" – love for community

[24] See, for example, Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 203.

[25] Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions, Volume* 1 (Santa Barbara: ABL-CLIO, 2008), 143.

[26] Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 14.

members and hatred for the men of the pit (1QS 9.14-16).[27] In the future, members of the community will separate from any "man who has not withdrawn his hand from wickedness" and mandates "everlasting hatred for [these] men of the pit" (1QS 9.15-10.3).[28]

The Damascus Document reinterprets Leviticus 19 according to this sectarian ideology: "They should take care to act in accordance with the exact interpretation of the law for the age of wickedness: to keep apart from the sons of the pit . . .[and] for each to love his brother like himself; to strengthen the hand of the poor, the needy and the [resident] foreigner . . ." (CD 6.14-15, 20-21).[29]

Sect members are to love their "brother," a fellow member of the sect, and fulfill mitzvot listed in Leviticus 19 that concern the vulnerable and the resident foreigner. By eliminating the sons of the pit, substituting "brother" for "neighbor," and not mentioning Jews we are in neither group, the sectarian writer has transformed Leviticus 19:18 from a mitzvah to love all Jews to a sectarian rule.

Christopher Stroup[30] analyzes the evidence concerning the "men" or "sons" of the pit found in the Damascus Document (CD). He concludes that men of the pit are Israelites who are outside the new covenant community; not all Jews but "a specific group of outsiders characterized by their unjust wealth (CD 6:15), their association with the temple (CD 6:16) and their differing interpretations of Sabbath regulations, festivals and days of fasting (CD 6:19)."

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[27] Ibid., 14.

[28] Ibid., 14-15.

[29] Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 559.

[30] Christopher Stroup, "A Reexamination of the 'Sons of the Dawn' in CD" 13:14-15A. (Paper presented at the New England Society for Biblical Literature Conference, April 24, 2009), 7-8.

This lines up with Florentino Garcia Martinez' claim that in several documents, characteristics of the "enemies" match what we know of the Sadducees and Pharisees.[31]

According to Josephus, sectarians did not only live in isolated desert compounds "many of them dwell in every city.[32] While he is not always a careful historian and we cannot verify his claim, if there was a sectarian presence in Galilee, it was "under the radar." It would then be conceivable that a small number of devotees or itinerant preachers promoted their teachings orally in order to recruit members as they promoted their negative views of those who teaching violated sectarian doctrine.

Yeshua instructed his disciples to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (v. 44), which may be a reference to persecution they would suffer at the hands of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They should not allow themselves to hate their persecutors and thus create the same kind of division that the sectarians did. He said that God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (v. 45), conveying the strong implication that his disciples should not hate those whom God has chosen to sustain in this world. This brings us back to the sectarian teaching. Although "good and evil . . . righteous and unrighteous" are common biblical categories, they are central concepts in the sectarian world view and serve as frequently-used rhetorical devices to define and reinforce group boundaries. Yeshua undermined the sectarian world view by pointing out that God bestows the gift of life on all Jews. It is noteworthy that the contrast "Jews and Gentiles" (or any equivalent duality) does not appear in the passage. Yeshua mentioned Gentiles only as a negative example.

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[31] Martinez, lv.

[32] Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*. 2.124. Online: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0148%3Abook%3D2%3Asection%3D124.

> *[46]For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47]If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48]Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Yeshua did not accept any teaching that would limit the obligation to love one's fellow Jew by sectioning off some Jews as worthy of hate and unworthy of love, a violation of the plain sense of the mitzvot of Lev. 19:17-18. Likewise, Yeshua did not accept limiting love only to the committed – to those who love you as their neighbor – or to "brothers," members of your religious or social group. Yeshua did not promote the notion that his disciples should become an isolated sect that would promote divisions in Israel.

Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls is not as strong as I would like because we cannot prove that it was disseminated orally; but it stronger than the total absence of evidence that someone was teaching Jews to hate their political, ethic, and person enemies, an assumption on which the consensus Christian interpretation depends. Without such evidence, the claim that Yeshua taught Jews to love *all* their enemies cannot be sustained. If my interpretation of this passage is correct, Yeshua did not mention Jewish relations with non-Jews because he spoke only about relations within the covenant community, as Leviticus 19:18 does.

Yeshua drew his disciples' attention to the Torah's instructions on how to live in the midst of imperfection. The demand not to "hate your fellow countryman in your heart [but] love your neighbor as yourself" require subservience to God and a radical commitment to the Torah and to the community it is meant to shape.

The sectarian tendency to distribute love and hate according to a fellow Jew's beliefs and practice is present in the Jewish world today. It is not unusual to hear or read of Orthodox Jewish

contempt for non-Orthodox and unaffiliated Jews while non-Orthodox and unaffiliated Jews scorn the Orthodox. Sadly, Messianic Jews, who are mocked in much of the Jewish world, are also guilty of disparaging the others and, at times, one another.

A midrash produced by sages sometime before the fifth century illustrates a different approach. It speaks of the four species that are gathered together (collectively called the "lulav") and waved during the festival of Sukkot. The four species represent four types of Jews who make up the Jewish community.

> *And you shall take on the first day the fruit the fruit of a beautiful tree, palm fronds, and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Eternal One, your God, for seven days* (Lev 23:40).
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> . . . *The fruit of a beautiful tree* – these are Israel. Just as this etrog has taste and fragrance, likewise Israel—there are people among them who possess Torah learning and good deeds.
>
> *Palm fronds*—these are Israel. Just as this palm-tree has taste but not fragrance, so Israel—there are people among them who possess Torah learning but not good deeds.
>
> *And boughs of leafy trees* —these are Israel. Just as the myrtle has fragrance but no taste, so Israel—there are people among them who possess good deeds but not Torah learning.
>
> *And willows of the brook*—these are Israel. Just as the willow has no taste and no fragrance, so Israel—there are people among them who possess neither Torah learning nor good deeds.
>
> What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do to them? To destroy them is impossible. But, says the Holy One, blessed be He, "Let them all be joined together in one bundle and [thus] atone for one another."
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> "If you have done so [says the Eternal One], thus, at that very moment, I am exalted." Therefore Moses exhorts Israel: *And you shall take on the first day the fruit*. (Leviticus Rabbah 30:12)

The sages who produced this midrash placed a very high value on community solidarity. Although they undoubtedly viewed themselves as the etrog, possessing Torah learning and good

deeds, they expressed a radical inclusiveness even for Jews who were devoid of both. For them, the community consists of all sorts of Jews who are bound together by God.[33] Envisioning the community as a lulav is a profound expression of love, of being *for* others as the sages were for themselves.

The midrash is a lesson for Judaism at large and for Messianic Judaism. It adopts the mitzvah to love one's fellow Jew on a broad scale, putting aside the tendency to be against those whose ideology or practices differ from theirs and who could be viewed as destructive to the community. The answer to such differences is not to insist on identical beliefs and practices or to consider all beliefs and practices to be equally valid but to consider all Jews to be of equal worth and to be *for* them, not against them. This is true of the Jewish world generally and the Messianic Jewish world in particular. The true value of community does not reside in its best members (however we define them), but in the totality of all its members.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

> [25] And a Torah scholar[34] stood up and put [Yeshua] to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" . . . [29] But wishing to justify himself, he said to Yeshua, "And who is my neighbor?" [30] Yeshua replied [by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan]."

[33] This use of the root *kipper* [to cover; to atone] to express mutual atonement is unique in the writings of formative Judaism (up to @700 C.E.).

[34] A non-expert reader would have no idea that in this context *nomikos* , the Greek word usually translated "lawyer," must refer to an expert in the Torah; hence, "Torah scholar." See *The New Testament Greek Lexiscon*. Online: http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?q=nomikos&rc=LEX&rc2=LEX+GRK&ps=10&s=References. David H. Stern adds "including both the Written *Torah* and the Oral *Torah*." *Jewish New Commentary*. (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 122.

You know the parable. A man is attacked by thieves on the road coming down from Jerusalem to Jericho; he is stripped, beaten, and left half-dead. A priest and a Levite come along and ignore him, passing on the other side of the road. A Samaritan happens by and, filled with compassion, personally tends to the man's wounds and pays for his recuperation at a nearby inn.

Yeshua asked the Torah scholar, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?" And the Torah scholar responded, "The one who showed mercy to him." And Yeshua finished the conversation by telling the Torah scholar, "Go and do the same."

The predominant Christian interpretations of this passage claim that Yeshua gave a new meaning (or restored the original meaning) of the word "neighbor," just as he supposedly did in the Sermon on the Mount. The first of two[35] long-standing interpretations is based on the claim that the Samaritan was a hated enemy of the Jews and Yeshua used a Samaritan in his parable to show the Torah scholar that he should love his enemy and, by extension, all humanity. Yet here, as in the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua did not actually say that; it is a deduction based primarily on the claim that the Samaritans were the hated enemy of the Jews.[36]

[35] A third interpretation, which has appeared occasionally since early Christianity, is that Yeshua is the Good Samaritan.

[36] Broad statements such as "The hostility between Jews and Samaritans in that time is well known" John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Vol. 35b Luke 9:21-18:34.*(Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) 537. are made with mere anecdotal support or reference to events over five hundred years previous. A number of interpreters rely on the work of Joachim Jeremias who correctly cites some negative statements about the Samaritans but does not claim that they were "hated" or "enemies of the Jews." He incorrectly writes, "from the beginning of the first century AD they were regarded as being on a level with the Gentiles in all things ritual and cultic." *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1969), 356. Jeremias takes the unusual approach of using the opinions of post-Hurban sages to represent pre-Hurban conditions.

Surely the status of the Samaritan in Jewish eyes is a key to interpreting the parable. But what if the claim that Samaritans were hated enemies of the Jews is not true or not completely true? What if there were a wide array of attitudes toward the Samaritans and Jews had varying kinds of relationships with them? The parable might require a different interpretation.

In the Besorot, the attitude of Jews toward Samaritans is uneven.[37] Yeshua says nothing negative about them and may have broken with custom by talking with a Samaritan woman and preaching to the Samaritans (John 4:7-27, 39-43); The comment in John 4:9 that "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" may well relate to the Jews' general avoidance of Samaria rather than a full avoidance of contact; after all, the disciples had just gone into a Samaritan city to buy groceries (John 4:7). There was, at the time, no general halakhic prohibition against dealing with Samaritans; some dealings were permitted and others were not.[38] No group mentioned in the Besorot (Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes etc.) has anything at all to say about the Samaritans. Since the Torah scholar was almost certainly among "the Pharisees and Scribes," there is no reason to assume that he would have considered the Samaritan in the parable a hated enemy.

Historian Pieter Willem van der Horst, having reviewed the full body of historical evidence, concludes that after the earlier period of great conflict, in late Second Temple times

[37] The last mention of the Samaritans in the Tanakh is dated in 521 B.C.E when Zerubbabel rejected their claim to participate in the building of the Temple (Ezra 4:3 and 6:11-12). More than five hundred years later, in John 8:48, "Samaritan" is used as a pejorative term. The Samaritans interrupted Jews traveling toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:53), which probably contributed to the Jewish avoidance of Samaria in both directions.

Meanwhile, Yeshua healed a Samaritan leper and praised him for his gratitude (Luke 17:15-18), asked a drink of a Samaritan woman and spoke with her (John 4:7), and preached to the Samaritans (John 4:40-42).

[38] Jeremias, 356-357

"there is no unequivocal Jewish view of the Samaritans."[39] "The Samaritans are at the same time both Jews and non-Jews. . . [They] were strange coreligionists who were hard to identify and who therefore made it difficult to define the boundaries between them and the Jews."[40] In other words, things had calmed down somewhat since the earlier conflict and Jews had a variety of opinions about their relations with the Samaritans.

In the halakhah of the time, the Samaritans were considered neither Jew nor Gentile. They had a version of the Torah that was only marginally different from the Jewish version and were very serious in their practices, some of which conformed to Jewish standards; they could almost be considered Jews. Then again, other practices did not conform to Jewish standards; they could almost be considered Gentiles. Yeshua and the Torah scholar would have known this.

We see the ambiguous status of the Samaritan in the table practices of the time. When three or more Jews had eaten a meal together, they were required to recite the Grace after Meals; this would include a Samaritan who was dining with them (M. Berachot 7.1).[41] Moshe Lavee comments that this passage "assumes a common activity of Jews and Samaritans (having meals together), and permits their collaboration for a liturgical activity. Not only an actual social contact, but also shared codes of practice and belief."[42] In Mishnah Berachot 8.8, we learn that Jews were required to respond with "Amen" after a Samaritan who said a blessing (for example,

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[39] Pieter Willem Van der Horst, *Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman Context*. (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2006), 150.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Dated to the late Second Temple by David Instone-Brewer, arguably the foremost living scholar in the area of dating early rabbinic traditions. David Instone Brewer *Traditions Of The Rabbis From The Era Of The New Testament, Volume 1: Prayer And Agriculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 77.

[42] Moshe Lavee, "The Samaritan may be included – Another Look at the Samaritan in Talmudic Literature." Pages 147-174 in *Samaritans – Past and Present: Current Studies* (ed. Menachem Mor and Friedrich V. Reiterer. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 149.

over wine), if he said it correctly. Lavee concludes from these and other Mishnah passages,[43] that Samaritans were included among Jews when they acted in accordance with Torah as it was interpreted in this period.

Yeshua and the apostles also distinguished between Samaritans and Gentiles. For example, when Yeshua sent out the twelve, he instructed them "not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans" (Matt. 10:5). He does not explain why he mentions the two separately; I suggest that they could not be grouped together as one group because they had different halakhic statuses. We see the fundamental importance of this distinction in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 8, Philip preached the besorah successfully in Samaria. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard about it, they sent Peter and John to help out (Acts 8: 14-15). But in chapter 10, that same Peter had to be dragged, practically kicking and screaming, to preach to the Gentile Cornelius and his household. They received Peter's message, but when he returned to Jerusalem, he was criticized for going to Gentiles and eating with them (Acts 11:2-3)! Simply put, the apostles did not consider the Samaritans to be Gentiles. The Samaritans could easily be incorporated into the new "Messianic Jewish" movement without conversion to Judaism but there was great hesitancy admitting the Gentiles without conversion.

The effectiveness of the parable rests on the unusual status of the Samaritan. We cannot say that Yeshua intended to teach the Torah scholar to love his enemies (and therefore all humanity) because we do not have any reason to believe that the Torah scholar or the group he was part of considered the Samaritans as enemies. Instead, Yeshua used the ambiguous halakhic

[43] See Demai 3.4; 7.4; Sheviit 8.10; Eruv. 3.2; Rosh Hashanah 2.2; Niddah 4.1, 2. Later, rabbinic attitudes toward the Samaritans grew negative for reasons that are not relevant to this paper.

status of the Samaritan to open the Torah scholar's heart and mind to what it means to love his neighbor as himself.

A second long-standing interpretation of the parable is that Yeshua used the Samaritan as a moral exemplar and to answer the Torah scholar's question, "And who is my neighbor?" If he, your hated enemy, is a good neighbor to someone in need, then you should consider those in need as your neighbors, whoever they are. I agree that Yeshua used the Samaritan as a moral exemplar but not in the way envisioned by this interpretation, in which the unidentified injured man stands for "anyone in need." There are at least three reasons for doubting this interpretation: (1) the interpretation of parables should be guided by what the darshan, the one who speaks the parable, says about it; Yeshua did not even mention the injured man's lack of identification; (2) it seems reasonable to expect that if Yeshua had intended to use the parable as the basis for altering a central mitzvah in the Torah, he would have been explicit about it; but he did not; (3) if the situation in the parable had arisen in real life, it is likely that the injured man would have been considered a person of doubtful status and would have been treated as a Jew based on two halakhic parallels in Yeshua's time.[44]

According to Michael Fagenblat, "Contrary to many interpretations, however, the parable [of the Good Samaritan] neither redefines the term 'neighbor' nor abolishes the distinction between Jew and Gentile. Jews did not regard Samaritans as Gentiles. . . .The parable of the

[44] Mishnah Sotah 9.2 and Makhshirin 2.7 are based on the lenient principle that, in each case, it would be better to treat a non-Jew as a Jew than treat a Jew as a non-Jew.

Good Samaritan should therefore not be understood as redefining the category of 'neighbor' so as to include Gentiles, for the parable makes no reference to Gentiles."[45]

If the wording of a Samaritan's blessing met the halakhaic standard, Jews were required to say "amen" and the Samaritan would be considered among the Jews. Let us imagine that Jews and Gentiles were color-coded blue and red. The Samaritan would have been purple to start with; but when he said a blessing or did certain other things according to halakhic standards, he would turn blue – indistinguishable from the blue Jews. When the Samaritan helped the injured man he fulfilled the mitzvah to love his neighbor as himself ; he would turn blue and thus be counted among the Jews. But the standard fulfilled by the Samaritan was apparently above the standard held by the Torah scholar. First of all, when he saw the man's condition, he felt compassion for him – he loved him in his heart. Then he personally tended to his needs, took him to the inn and paid his bill in advance, and pledged to pay the innkeeper for any additional expense. As far as I can tell, he left nothing undone. This is the gold standard for loving your neighbor as yourself and the Torah scholar knew it. The Samaritan "proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*."

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that up to that time the Torah scholar's standard had been lower and when the Samaritan "turned blue" in the parable, his own practice was exposed as insufficient.[46] When Yeshua said to him, "Go and do the same" (Luke 10:36-37), the Torah scholar did not attempt to justify himself any more. He accepted Yeshua's authority as a Torah teacher and as one who could set halakhic norms.

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[45] Fagenblat 542-543.

[46] The generally accept standard required in Yeshua's time in not clear; space does not permit discussing it in the depth it requires.

Yeshua interpreted Leviticus 19:18 according to its plain sense, contextual meaning but he defined the scope and demands of the mitzvah in a distinct way. Unlike some Jewish voices of his own and later times that would exclude certain Jews, Yeshua taught his disciples that the mitzvah requires us to love even Jews who act like enemies or persecute us. Also, though Judaism is replete with halakhah and wisdom that promote Ahavat Yisrael, the gold standard that Yeshua sets in the parable of the Good Samaritan and elsewhere[47] has not been accepted in traditional or modern Judaism; indeed, what I have characterized as "heroic action" has been criticized as unrealistic.[48]

So this is where commandment and character intersect – loving our neighbor as our self is not a minimal halakhic obligation; it even requires Jews to act heroically when others do not fulfill their basic obligations. This depth of obligation makes sense when we consider that loving one's neighbor as oneself is not merely an ethical standard that can be measured on an objective scale but an obligation to live a certain way in relation to others. The love of our neighbor is not an abstraction; it takes place in the common and uncommon circumstances of life. But it is not usually dramatic; ordinary life is filled with situations in which love is required, a love that is infused in all ethical mitzvot such as speaking truthfully, dealing honestly, and not stealing from or slandering my neighbor. Living ethically day by day and being a Good Samaritan when

[47] Matthew 7:12.

[48] See, for example, the comments of Rabbi Benjamin Hecht: "The call upon the human being cannot be in the positive to treat another just like oneself for one has an obligation to take care of oneself first. (See Vayikra 25:36 as explained in T.B. Baba Metzia 62a.). It is also contrary to human nature to demand an individual to treat everyone as one treats oneself. If I buy myself a car, am I expected to buy everyone else a car?"

Both of these arguments set up straw men, since Leviticus 19:18 and Yeshua's interpretation both assume that loving ourselves is the standard for treating others and must therefore come first. Also, far as I know no one suggests that this means buying everyone else a copy of everything we buy for ourselves. Benjamin Hecht, "An Orthodox Answer." Online: http://www.jewishvaluesonline.org/499.

others' critical needs arise are two sides of the same coin and both are required to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The consensus Christian interpretation claims that Yeshua's taught that the "neighbor" is "all humanity." So "all humanity" replaces "my [Jewish] neighbor," an eerie parallel to the theology that the Church, which is drawn from all humanity, has replaced Israel in the mind and heart of God. In these forms of ethics and theology, there is no "official" room for the ongoing identity of Israel, Israel's relationship with Torah, or the kinds of relational connections that are necessary to bind them together as a people. There are many Christians who love and support the Jewish people in the "unofficial" space that many Christian groups allow.

When Messianic Jews accept the consensus Christian (or liberal Jewish) interpretation of "love your neighbor," we inadvertently create or perpetuate a rift between our theology and our ethics. Our Messianic Jewish theology declares that we bound with Israel in a community meant to be shaped by Torah but our ethics will declare that we may love Israel only as fellow members of the human race. In addition, we will have severed ourselves from the traditional Jewish interpretation of Leviticus 19:18, which is plain sense and contextual, as "love your [Jewish] neighbor as yourself."

In a multitude of instances, Jewish and Christian traditions help us to understand the words of Yeshua and the apostles. At other times, their words act as a corrective for subsequent traditions. I argue that Yeshua understood the meaning of the word "neighbor" in its Leviticus 19:18 context and that his interpretation is definitive; it is the measuring rod for all subsequent Jewish and Christian traditions. His interpretation is narrow in comparison with the broad

interpretation of "neighbor" as "all humanity;" yet, as Messianic Jews, we do not have the option of obscuring his teaching or his application of the mitzvah to Jewish life.

3

A New Mitzvah

On the night in which he was betrayed, Yeshua gave some last minute instructions to his disciples; among them was a "new commandment,"[49] a new mitzvah that would become the guiding ethical principle in their life and service in the Body of Messiah: "A new mitzvah I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35).

To state the obvious, the new commandment is a mitzvah; it mandates that the disciples love one another according to a very high standard ("as I have loved you") that will enable the rest of humanity to know that these are Yeshua's disciples. This mitzvah is new because it did not come from Sinai and is not a teaching about existing mitzvot; it comes from Yeshua's mouth at that moment and with authority. It is also new because – little did the disciples know – it is the ethical basis and glue for a new community that would be formed of Jewish and Gentile followers of Yeshua.

The disciples had walked with Yeshua for some time so they understood, at least in part, what "as I have loved you" meant. Later, they would see its greatest expression in the death of Yeshua and participate in bringing Gentiles under the wings of this mitzvah. Over time, they

[49] Everything that Yeshua had commanded his disciples previously (see John 14:15 and 15:10) is summed up in the single commandment to "love one another" (John 15:12).

would develop a body of teaching, related to the mitzvah, which was intended to produce in individuals and communities the very love that Yeshua had shown for them. Later some of them, especially John, would write letters to explain the new mitzvah to those who had not experienced Yeshua as they had.

The apostolic letters quote or paraphrase the new mitzvah in sixteen places. Additional ethical instructions based on the reciprocal "one another" language occur over forty times, depending on how they are counted.[50] They form a body of instruction that depends on the new mitzvah to "love one another as I have loved you" in the same way that the Torah depends on "love your [Jewish] neighbor as yourself."

Although the writer of Hebrews, James, and Peter all reference "love for one another," the new mitzvah is most prominent in the Johannine letters, where it is repeated six times. John writes

> *For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another . . . We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love [only] with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.* (1 John 3:11, 16-18)

John explains Yeshua's love by its extreme expression in martyrdom. Unexpectedly, he does not describe the ethical life of Yeshua-believers' in terms of martyrdom but as maintaining an open heart and sharing our resources in the context of community. As in the case of "Love your neighbor as yourself," those who are given material assistance are not passive recipients but

[50] Many of the ethical instructions in the Apostolic Writings are based on precedents in the Torah of Moses. See Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginnings of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) and Martin Meiser, ed. *The Torah in the Ethics of Paul*. (London: T &T Clark, 2012).

active members of the community who are also responsible to love the other members. This love is reciprocal and communal.

John is concerned that disciples may talk the talk but not walk the walk. By use of a rhetorical question, he makes the stakes clear: those who close their heart to poor Yeshua-believers do not love God. The connection between love of God and compassion for the poor could not be clearer. John knows that a heart that is open enough to speak loving words may close tight when it comes to serious giving to others. The ethical imperative to give materially tests human character.

John further explores the relationship between love of God and love of fellow Yeshua-believers in Chapter 5.

> *Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe his mitzvot. For this is the love of God, that we keep his mitzvot; and his mitzvot are not burdensome* (John 5:1-3).

Because John is writing about love for Yeshua-believers, I am satisfied that he is referring primarily to the new mitzvah, which he writes about so much, and the mitzvot that spring from it.[51] He understands love in terms of mitzvot and mitzvot in terms of love. The mitzvot simply as ethical standards but in terms of relationship; mitzvot detail our un-burdensome obligations to God and our fellow Yeshua-believers and must therefore always be seen relationally. I submit that this needs to be our underlying approach to Messianic Jewish ethics. Love without mitzvot (or rules) has no clear shape and cannot build community. Mitzvot

[51] This is in line with Yeshua's dual reference to "keep my mitzvot " and "This is my mitzvah that you love one another, just as I have loved you" in John 15:10, 12.

or rules without love cannot produce Messianic Jews who are ethical in their actions *and* their heart.

Although Paul did not walk with Yeshua as the other apostles had, his letters are rich with ethical instruction based on the new mitzvah, which he cites five times. Paul describes ethical obligations of Yeshua- believers in the reciprocal "one another" language of the new mitzvah. They should be devoted to one another in brotherly love, give preference to one another, through love serve one another, show tolerance for one another in love, be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Messiah also has forgiven them, and also comfort, encourage, live in peace, admonish, and seek after that which is good for one another, etc. Paul sees the new mitzvah primarily in its positive aspect, but also forbids hating, biting, devouring, and lying to one another and, by implication, does not allow for indifference to one another's well-being. Ethical instructions which are not given in the "one another" format are consistent with the ones which are; therefore, they form one body of instruction that can be understood in terms of "love one other."

Toward the conclusion of Paul's ethical teaching sent to the Galatians, he urges his audience to "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the Torah of Messiah" (Gal. 6:2). At first glance, "Bear one another's burdens" seems like yet another example of reciprocal language that echoes "love one another." But I suggest that Paul is saying that bearing one another's burdens is actually the essence of the Torah of Messiah and therefore encompasses all of his ethical teaching that is implicit in the new mitzvah.[52]

[52] For an overviewof interpretation of "Torah of Christ," see Richard B. Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ," *CBQ 49* (1987) 268-90.

As in the mitzvah to "love your neighbor as yourself," the new mitzvah requires concrete action that arises from a loving inclination of the heart. This underlies Paul's thought in 1 Corinthians 13, where he writes that he could give sacrificially to the needy and suffer for the sake of God, but without love he is nothing. Although acts of giving benefit the recipients, without love – that is, without empathy and compassion – the giver has not forged a connection between his experience of suffering and another's.

Bearing another's burden is the essence of Messiah's love for us and therefore must be the essence of our love for one another. He did not only bear human sin and sickness; he was "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" who "bore our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Is. 53:3-4)." Although Isaiah's prophecy was given to Israel, the Apostolic Writings make it clear that Yeshua's life and death were for all humanity. It is therefore impossible to separate Yeshua's experience from the griefs, sorrows, and sins of all humanity; his empathy, compassion, and bearing our griefs and sorrows was the way he lived and the way he died. We do not normally live that way, and so empathy, compassion, and their resulting practices must be intentionally cultivated in us and our communities. I believe that this is what Paul means by his claim that bearing one another's burdens fulfills the Torah of Messiah.[53]

An in-depth treatment of bearing another's burden is found in *Chokhma U-Mussar* (*Wisdom and Ethical Instruction*), a work of the Rav Simcha Zissel.[54] Rav Simcha describes the varied nature of others' burdens and practices that increase one's ability to bear them. I would add the contemplation of how Messiah humanly bore our (not only *my*) griefs, sorrows, and sins

[53] See the Appendix, 38-40 for Paul's only other use of "Torah of Messiah" in 1 Cor. 9:21.

[54] Simcha Zissel, *Chokhmah U-Mussar*, trans. Ira F. Stone. Pages 157-231 in Ira F. Stone, *A Responsible Life* (New York: Aviv Press, 2006).

so that I can glimpse how a human being such as I can do the same for my fellow, albeit in a limited way.[55]

Given the understandable absence of Messiah Yeshua in his work, the approach of Rav Zissel is largely compatible with Messianic Judaism, as is the work of many Mussar masters. This is why Riverton Mussar,[56] a center for Messianic Mussar, can almost seamlessly employ traditional and contemporary Mussar teaching in their work.

4

MESSIANIC JEWISH ETHICS

Messianic Jews and our communities have a unique set of ethical obligations to our fellow Jews, the ekklesia, humanity, and the created order. I have focused on the first two obligations because, taken together, they express the basic characteristics of Messianic Jewish ethics. In the simplest terms, Messianic Jewish ethics is *Jewish* because it rests on the Torah's mitzvah to "love your [Jewish] neighbor as yourself" and develops with respect to ethical practices and procedures of Judaism; it is *Messianic* because it also rests on Yeshua's new mitzvah to "love one another as I have loved you" and develops in consultation with Christian ethical tradition.

However, our ethics is fully integrated as Messianic *and* Jewish because of the pervasive influence of the teaching, example, and presence of Messiah Yeshua. From him we learn about Ahavat Yisrael and love in the Body of Messiah. In his death, he exemplified Ahavat Yisrael and the measure of love that should flourish in the Body of Messiah. He is also present with us to

[55] See Gal. 6:1, where the closest we get to bearing others' sin is to restore them.

[56] Riverton Mussar: A wellspring for ethical change. Online: http://www.rivertonmussar.org.

urge and aid us to love our fellow Jews and fellow Yeshua-believers. For Yeshua, these two mitzvot must go hand in hand. The teaching and life of Yeshua are measuring rods for all other ethical teachings and for every life.

Messianic Jewish ethics is forged in communities, as Paul Saal pointed out in 2005.

> What I have been attempting to establish is that ethical practices are not derived merely from a concretized set of rules, laws or values, but from the very essence and nature of the community in which they are practiced. Since Messianic Judaism is an incipient religious community, the task of defining our practices and our moral vision is both a theological and a social endeavor. When we approach any particular moral quandary, we are not asking what seems reasonable to each of us as individuals within the community, rather what we believe God expects of us as a community in this particular circumstance and at this particular time in history." (Saal 11).

Messianic Jewish ethics are not only ethics for individuals in community; they are defined and developed in community and worked out in the context of actual moral quandaries. One of the assumptions of Saal's paper is that we do did not then have a defined Messianic Jewish ethics (ibid., 9). As far as I can tell, nothing has changed in this regard since 2005. There have been a few additional Messianic Jewish ethical writings but, until this Forum, no public Messianic Jewish conversation about the shape and nature of Messianic Jewish ethics.

Saal continues, "Until Messianic Judaism can self-define, the enterprise of ethical discourse will be a far distant reality" (ibid.). The importance of ethical self-definition can be seen in one of our most pressing moral quandaries: how to live together as Jews and Gentiles in the ekklesia and especially in congregations; this in turn is deeply affected by the relationship of Messianic Jews to the larger Jewish community. Discussion about these things can get quite heated and unpleasant; harsh words may be spoken and feelings hurt, resulting in alienation and mistrust.

While we need to be respectful to one another even when we see this issue differently, it is perhaps less obvious that the very issues we are discussing – the relationship of Jew and Gentile and internal Jewish relationships – is as ethical as it is theological. Messianic Jews are part of Israel and the ekklesia, bound theologically by covenant with both communities and bound ethically by our obligation to love members of both communities. This puts the ekklesia and, especially, Gentiles in our congregations, in a very challenging position: Jews are joined to them but we also to another, to Israel, in a way that they are not. This situation is ripe for suspicion, mistrust, and worse – relational issues that are not susceptible to theological arguments or even explanations of our ethical obligation to love our fellow Jews.

Looking at it from a Gentile perspective, our dual allegiance may look or feel like adultery, which is a zero-sum game: what the mistress gains, the wife loses, and vice-versa. I maintain that the relationship of Messianic Jews to other Jews and fellow Yeshua-believers is more like a woman and two close friends. She can love them both and enjoy a unique relationship with each one without short-changing the other. Healing begins when we Messianic Jews *actually* love both of the "sisters" – uniquely and fully, or at least actively *grow* in love for both our fellow Jews and our fellow Yeshua-believers. If our love is real, most people will know that we are for them, not against them.

I do not want to be misunderstood: love does not displace the importance of our identification with both Israel and the ekklesia or the priority of sustaining Jewish identity and continuity; it should work with them hand in hand. But since love is greater than faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13), I suspect it is greater than theological agreement. As Peter wrote nearly two millennia ago, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a

multitude sins" (1 Pet. 4:8); love will bind us together with those we may argue and disagree with.

The two mitzvot – "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" and "Love one another as I have loved you" – are the first two steps in Messianic Jewish ethics because they make for a distinct Messianic Jewish ethics and offer the possibility of building ethical and harmonious Messianic Jewish communities. They help prepare communities to address ethical issues that affect the community and also the world. Of course, an ethical community, like ethical individuals, will address its own ethical challenges first of all.[57]

[57] See an example in the Appendix, 40-41.

APPENDIX

1. LOVE THE RESIDENT FOREIGNER AS YOURSELF

> *"When a resident foreigner* (Heb., ger, usually translated as "alien") *resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The ger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt . . ."* (Lev. 19:33-34)

The *ger* (fem, *gerah*) is a non-Israelite who lives among Jews in the Land, not in a temporary role as a visitor, soldier, or trader, but permanently. Resident foreigners have uprooted themselves (or have been uprooted) from their homeland and taken up permanent residence in the land of Israel. They usually have no extended family to turn to for support. If they leave the Land, they lose their status in the Torah.

The measure of love for the *ger* is identical to the love for one's fellow Jew in verse 18.[58] This represents a Torah ethics that does not focus exclusively within a social group, de-legitimizing everyone else. The resident foreigner "shall be to you as the native among you." This is not simply a personal mandate but a mitzvah for the whole community; to love the resident alien implies that the community as a whole must welcome her, for love takes place within the community shaped by Torah. This mitzvah requires Jews to overcome prejudices and love those whose language and culture differs from theirs. The resident foreigner then participates in the privileges and obligations of Torah;[59] she, too, must love her Jewish neighbor as herself.[60]

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[58] While the mitzvot to "love your neighbor" and "love the resident foreigner" are very similar, they cannot be merged into one. There is a special reason for loving the resident foreigner: although she is not a Jew, she is helpless in the Land, just as Israel was in Egypt. Also, she must remain in the Land to retain her status while Jews remain members of Israel even if they leave the Land.

[59] Num 15:15-16. The only exception is that gerim may eat torn animals, which are forbidden to Jews (Deut 14:21). I suspect that this leniency is due to the particularly poor and helpless condition of *gerim.*

[60] It has been suggested that this mitzvah might apply to Gentiles in Messianic Jewish congregations. On Torah grounds it cannot apply unless the congregation is located in the Land of Israel

2. R. AKIBA, BEN AZZAI, AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Early in the second century in this Common Era, two sages disagreed about the relative significance of Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

ספרא פרשת קדושים פרק ד.יב
"ואהבת לרעך כמוך." רבי עקיבא אומר, זה כלל גדול בתורה.
בן עזאי אומר, "זה ספר תולדות אדם [ביום ברא אלהים אדם בדמות אלהים עשה אתו: ב זכר ונקבה בראם. . .] זה כלל גדול מזה.

> "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Rabbi Aqiba says, This is the great [or greatest] principle in the Torah.
>
> Ben Azzai says, "This is the book of the generations of Adam [*and the rest of the verse*, In the day when God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He made them male and female. . .]" (Gen. 5:1). This is a greater principle than that." (Sifra Parashah Qedoshim Chapter 4.12)

Until the twentieth century, the unanimous premise of all commentary on this passage was that R. Aqiba and Ben Azzai agree on the interpretation of "love your neighbor" – it means, "love your fellow Jew" – but disagree on whether it was the most important principle of Torah. Ben Azzai asserts that the fact that human beings are made in the image of God is a greater principle of Torah, presumably because it gives every human being the same fundamental value.

A new interpretation of this argument appeared in Hertz's widely-used commentary on the *Penteteuch and Haftoras*.[61] Hertz' version of the passage reads

> In the generation after the destruction of the temple, Rabbi Akiba declares, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is a fundamental rule in Torah. Ben Azzai agrees that this

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and observes Torah, and the resident foreigner is a permanent resident in the Land. Then Jewish tradition would also have to be addressed, which considers the word "*ger*" to refer to a convert to Judaism. Even more, within Yeshua's community we are to love one another as Messiah has loved us, whether Jew or Gentile, in the Land or not, or in the same congregation or not.

[61] J. H. Hertz, ed. (: Soncino Press, 1960)

> law of love is such a fundamental provided it is read with [Gen. 5:1] ("This is the book of the generations of man. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him"); for this latter verse teaches reverence for the divine image in man, and proclaims the vital truth of the unity of mankind, and the consequent doctrine of the brotherhood of man. All men are created in the Divine image, says Ben Azzai, all are our fellow men and entitled to human love.

Unfortunately, Hertz does not distinguish the original opinions and his interpretation. For those who do not have access to the original, this gives the impression that Ben Azzai agrees with Rabbi Aqiba and only wants to expand the meaning of "neighbor" to "all humanity." In fact, Ben Azzai is simply disagreeing with R. Aqiba.

Hertz is in the odd position of imposing a characteristically Christian interpretation of "love your neighbor" on a second century disagreement.

Since Hertz, Liberal Judaism has increasingly interpreted "neighbor" in Leviticus 19:18 as "humanity."

3. The Torah of Messiah in Apostolic Service

The apostles' ethical instruction includes lessons about relations with all human beings. Yeshua's disciples should "Respect what is right in the sight of all people. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people. (Rom. 12:17-18); "malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all people" (Tit. 3:2). They should "pursue peace with all people" (Hebrews 12:12). Even if others fail to live in peace with them, Yeshua believers must malign no one, act gently, and pursue peace.

I am not suggesting that controversial topics should be avoided, especially the besorah, but "be wise toward the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let

your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:5-6). So Paul knows that members of a community in which love flourishes and who also act appropriately toward "outsiders" will help create an atmosphere in which honest questions can be asked and answered. This takes place most holistically in the context of a true dialogue, in which questions are asked and answered in both directions. The obligation to be at peace with others and transmit the besorah to them is part of our ethical obligation to all who are made in the image and likeness of God.

Against the background of these apostolic instructions, Paul uses the term "Torah of Messiah" on one other occasion when he explains his apostolic approach to Gentiles.

> For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Torah, as under the Torah though not being myself under the Torah, so that I might win those who are under the Torah. [I became] to those who are without Torah, as without Torah, though not being without the Torah of God but [also] under the Torah of Messiah, so that I might win those who are without Torah (1 Cor. 9:19-21)

This passage, which contains several obvious difficulties, is interpreted comprehensively in David J. Rudolph's recent book on the subject. [62] I cite them because Paul claims that his accommodating approach (which Rudolph explains thoroughly) arises from his commitment to both Torahs and therefore to the two great ethical mitzvot upon which they depend: "love your neighbor as yourself" and "love one another as I have loved you." The new mitzvah, which must be at least a part of the Torah of Messiah, adds "by this [love for one another] all persons will know that you are my disciples." Paul seems to say that being "under the Torah of Messiah"

[62] See David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23*. (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2011)

compels him to accommodate himself to the status of those he serves, Jew or Gentile. His apostolic service is undertaken not only for their sake but in behalf the Body of Messiah. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of his body, which is the ekklesia, in filling up what is lacking in Messiah's afflictions" (Col. 1:24). Messiah completed his work but the purpose of his suffering is not achieved until the ekklesia brings word of him to the world. Paul is acting as an agent of the ekklesia, which also remains responsible to make Messiah known.

4. Animal Welfare

Many of the ethical and socio-political issues of our day impact, and may be present in, our communities in one way or another. A healthy, ethical community will address its own ethical challenges before making pronouncements about the ills of society. For example, a loving congregation could choose to discuss animal welfare. It would become well-informed about the issue, possible using Paul Saal's excellent material (Saal, 36-54). as a framework for discussion of how animals are raised for food. They would consider options such as becoming vegetarian, eating only Kosher meat that is also certified humane, and everything in between. Although the congregation might respond as a whole, it is more likely in an uncoerced environment that individual responses will vary. The congregation as a whole would make a positive impact on animal welfare even though it may include members who do nothing. At the same time, the congregation could consider supporting animal rescue. Remembering the lulav principle, the congregation will be content with its positive impact while *fully* accepting, and putting no pressure on, those who are less (or more!) zealous than others.

Our approach to these issues must begin within communities shaped by love of our [Jewish] neighbor and love of one another according the mitzvot. In my view, when an ethical issue can be addressed first of all within our communities, it should be addressed there before we make pronouncements, especially public ones, about that issue. We can be hopeful about forging a healthy approach to the larger ethical and socio-political issues of our time when we have an first-rate track record addressing ethical quandaries that face us internally.