

Biblical Transparency

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Most of us at Ohev have come to the place of desiring to live a biblical, holy, and Jewish life. Think of how far we have come, and yet how far we have yet to go. Think of the stages we went through that got us to where we are no matter how far that is. Each stage had its own challenges; some we got through easily, and some not so easily.

For some of us, finding out there is a supernatural world was a step, but that realization did not immediately lead us to the true God or any god. So some of us became Buddhists, some Hindus, and some played with spiritism, and New Age. If we survived the occult (and of course we did or we would not be here), there was then the step of being introduced to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or perhaps we first learned about Jesus – most of us knew that name before we learned his Hebrew name Yeshua – and eventually, we found out what Judaism and being either Jewish or non-Jewish had to do with it all.

Because we all come from different origins and travelled here by different routes, traumas that attended the stages of each of our developments were different for each of us, but there is at least one thing most of us have in common, and that is there were times of trauma in our various journeys, and some of us are even now going through them with our families and in other ways.

But by the grace and calling of God, we found our way to Ohev and to Jewish life, and we are on the path to solidifying our walk with God. We call this becoming discipled, not because we are in any kind of formal discipleship program, but because the Holy Spirit is making disciples of us. And for some of us, it's downright painful because becoming a disciple of Yeshua means changing things about ourselves in order to become more like Him. And change often comes hard.

Perhaps some of us have wondered about how discipled we really are, so we look at Yeshua and the disciples of Scripture with whom to compare ourselves, and that is right, provided we are honest in our self-assessments. What I want talk to you about today is a part of that self-assessment that may have eluded us; I will call it biblical transparency.

There are many accounts in Scripture where men of great faith sinned and then repented and were forgiven. We recall David's sin of taking Uriah's wife to himself and having Uriah killed on the battlefield. David did not admit his sin until the prophet Nathan confronted him with it, and only then did he admit, in 2 Samuel 12:13, that he had sinned against the Lord. His actions that followed proved his repentance, but not his transparency. Why not his transparency? Because he hid his sin before it was brought to light.

See how different it was with Isaiah. Isaiah did not think about himself as being in sin until he compared his state of relative unholiness to God's holiness. We read about it in chapter 6, verses 1 to 5 of the book that bears his name:

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.”

You see, Isaiah acknowledged his sin before he was forced to by disclosure. You may say that God’s presence forced it, but that is really true of us all and of all sin. We don’t know what sin is or in what way we are in it, unless God discloses it in Scripture, or by a visitation and conviction of the Holy Spirit.

There is much in the Bible to indicate and illustrate that repenting of sin for a believer is not a choice.

Acts 17:28-30 *“for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring. Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,...”*

Luke 24:45-47 *“And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”*

2 Peter 3:9 *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*

Repentance though, is not the same thing as transparency, although it is related. Repentance is what we do to turn away from our sin, make restitution, and turn toward God. We can often do that in complete secrecy between us and God, and without another person ever being aware of our sin and our repentance. Transparency, on the other hand, is our willingness lay our lives open to others – to our spouses, to our children, to our parents, to our friends, to our spiritual leaders, and to our fellow congregants. It is letting them see what is going on inside ourselves, in all aspects of our lives. It is not carrying secrets – especially sinful secrets. It is not only letting others see inside us, but if there is something that is sinful or troublesome going on inside, proactively bringing it to their attention and asking for help and prayer (which is help). Here is a Scripture that requires it in the context of healing.

James 5:16: *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

So confessing our sins to fellow believers when they do not know about them beforehand is a biblical principle. Such confession is proactive. It is not being found out and then confessing. But, you say, perhaps, that such transparency is only required in time of sickness, since that is the context of James 5:16. Well, sickness and being healed is not only a physical thing, any more than *shalom* is only physical rest. And it is not only in sickness that we are called to be transparent; I can show you from Scripture that it isn't, by the many occasions where Paul himself was transparent. In Romans 7:14-24, I believe Paul is talking about his pre-Yeshua life, but even so, how's this for transparency by a great apostle?

“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

Who among us thinks less of Paul for what he has admitted? Here's more of Paul:

1 Corinthians 15:9 *“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the ekklesia of God.”*

Okay, those admissions referred to Paul's past, but here's one of the present.

1 Timothy 1:15 *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Messiah Yeshua came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*

Perhaps we wouldn't judge Paul as harshly as he is judging himself, but here he is, admitting to Timothy and, by extension, to any contemporary of his who reads his letter, that he considers himself a sinner. And here is a Scripture in which he reveals that there is a “thorn of the flesh” (probably a temptation) with which he is wrestling and which he cannot get rid of:

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 *“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Messiah may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Messiah's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

What does this say to us? Do any of us have thorns in the flesh that plague us? Temptations to sin? Temptations to become angry? Temptations to retaliate for wrongs done to us? Temptations to take that which is not ours to take? Temptations to sinfully walk away from our families – our wives, our husbands, our children, our congregation? Are we so naïve as to think that such temptations do not befall believers? What of Paul? Wasn't he a believer? What then did Paul do about his thorn in the flesh which he had to endure yet dared not fall into sin? Well, one thing he did about it was that he revealed it to Timothy and probably to others as well, because here we are reading about it. And what benefit did Paul get from revealing it? The benefit was accountability. Even though Timothy was Paul's junior, once he knew what Paul was going through, he could hold Paul accountable, and we must assume that he did because he was tutored by Paul, and at another time and in another letter (this time to the Galatians), in chapter 6, verses 1 and 2, Paul taught:

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Messiah.”

It's perfectly plain that Paul expects believers to care for one another, and how much better it would be to help a brother or sister avoid sin, than to have to restore the brother or sister after the sin is committed, and damage has been done.

Now here's a fact. Most of us have been brought up by parents who extolled privacy, self-sufficiency, and saving face as virtues; the problem is that they are really not virtues according to Scripture. Instead, the opposite is true in Scripture; we are to be in community – not keep to ourselves; we are to both help and receive help from our community, and any conscious attempt we make to save face rather than repent with full disclosure can probably be diagnosed as sinful pride.

Brother and sister members of Ohev, we do not have a cultic leadership that wants to intrude into, and control your lives. But God does call us to holiness, and we see from Paul's example and other Scriptures that transparency and proactive disclosure to one another is encouraged as a way of keeping us accountable and of helping us to avoid sin, and stay safe. That disclosure and accountability need not be to leaders, and leaders themselves should seek to be accountable. Also, accountability is fine after the fact – that is to say, when something has already gone wrong, so that repair and restitution can be made, and justice can be served. But how much better it would be if our transparency to one another could keep things from going wrong in the first place.

I would like to recommend something very simple. It is that each of us have a friend with whom we are comfortable, and with whom we are willing to be transparent – to share our thoughts, our feelings, and our temptations to sin. Now ideally, that close friend is our wife, our husband, or if we are young, our parent, because that is what close family relations are for. Some of us have not thought that is what family is for, so let me say again – that is what family is for – to be transparent and receive loving accountability in a safe place. Regrettably, for some of us, our family relationships are not what they should be, and perhaps we don't think of our husbands, our wives, or our parents as friends with whom we want to share our innermost thoughts and to

whom we want to be accountable. If that is the case, our first need is not to look for an outside friend, but to take steps to repair that situation. The leaders of Ohev want to help you do that. For those of us who are unmarried adults and not living with our family, our family may still serve that function, but sometimes finding a biblically responsible friend who is a peer is the best solution. The bottom line is though, that we all need someone to talk with and confide in, but the responsibility is ours to be proactively transparent. In other words, it does no good to have that friend, and not go to him or her regularly to share our thoughts and feelings, and to receive wise counsel. David had that kind of relationship with Jonathan; should we desire any less?

Let's summarize by putting two of the Scriptures I already spoke of side by side; first to you in your role as a transparent believer:

James 5:16: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

Next, to you in your role as a friend whom another has come to, to confide in, and to receive accountability:

Galatians 6:1-2: *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Messiah.”*

There are some of us here who will not take my advice to find a friend with whom to be transparent and accountable because of either pride or fear – pride because of not wanting to be looked down on by another, and fear of becoming vulnerable to another. It is a pride that needs to go, and a fear that needs to go. What I want to do in the next minute or two is to ask everyone in the room to turn to a neighbor and pray for each other's willingness to be transparent and willingness to find someone – spouse, parent, or friend, to be transparent with. Please spend only a minute, and no confessions – only pray for a willingness to be transparent with a suitable person. When the minute is up, I'll call us back to order and we'll close the service.