

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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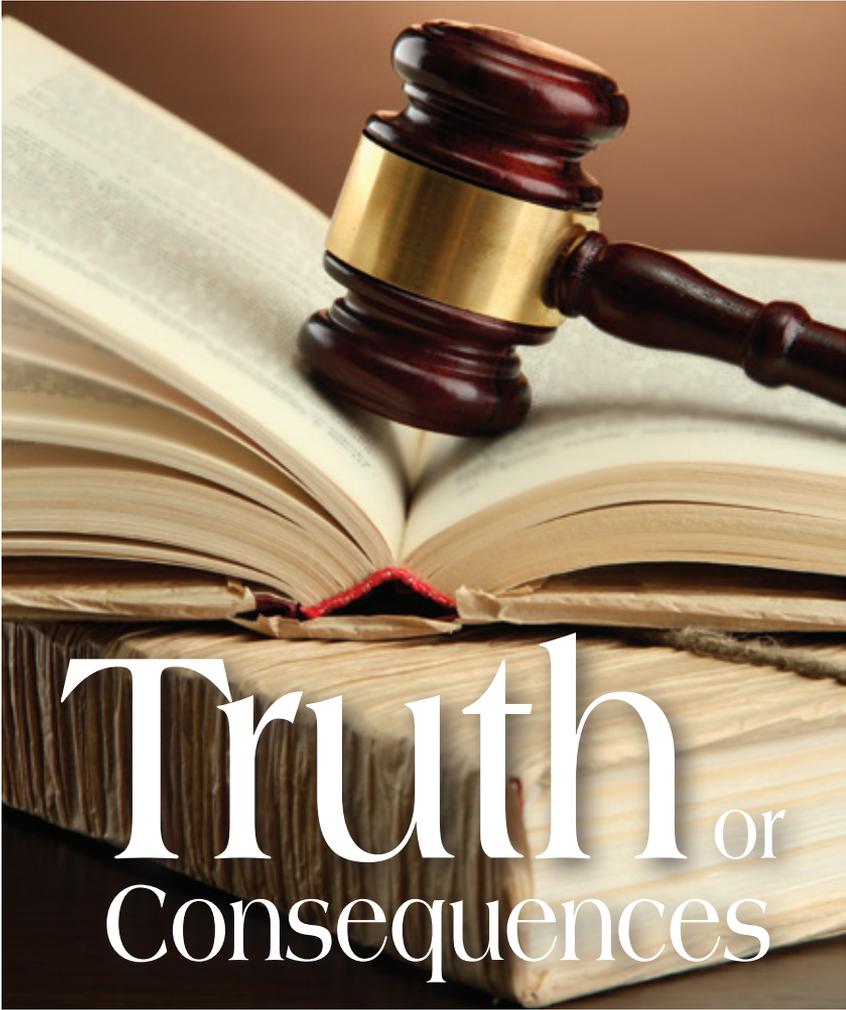
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Truth or Consequences

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Truth or Consequences

I REMEMBER A TELEVISION GAME SHOW ENTITLED, “Truth or Consequences.” Contestants were asked a hard-to-answer trivia question. If they couldn’t answer correctly then they had to do some silly stunt or embarrassing action. Ironically, most seemed to think that accepting the consequence was more fun than answering correctly. Truth was trivialized!

Today we live in a time when truth seems elastic. We are taught to be tolerant, and to embrace the idea that everyone can determine their own path—their own truth. With this philosophy, there are very few absolutes. In fact, I am coming to believe that modern society worships at the throne of tolerance and relativism. According to vocabulary.com, “relativism is the belief that there’s no absolute truth, only the truths that a particular individual or culture happen to believe. If

you believe in relativism, then you think different people can have different views about what's moral and immoral."

Our increasingly secular society views Christians who have a moral standard, or who believe the Bible has authority in our lives, or that God expects His children to behave according to His standards, as intolerant, judgmental haters. It is increasingly more common for Christians to be ridiculed in the public sphere.

When I was growing up in a Christian home, we were taught that truth was embodied in the Word of God, and not heeding God's truth had some very serious consequences. We were encouraged to search our hearts, repent often, and to keep short accounts with God and with those around us. We had a clear understanding of right and wrong. There didn't seem to be very many gray areas. In the 21st century, the world's mantra seems to be "everything is okay." Black-and-white has ceased to be relevant—everything is gray.

My father used to say, "We shouldn't expect believing behavior from unbelievers." Sadly, today we see unbelieving behavior in our churches and in the lives of those who profess to be believers. For example, I know of pastors who encourage couples they are counseling to live together before marriage to make sure they are compatible. Others teach a "hyper-grace," theology saying that because Yeshua's (Jesus) work on the cross saves us from all sin (past, present and future) there is no need for repentance for believers (only unbelievers).

Steve Hill in his book *Spiritual Avalanche*, told of a conversation he had with a spiritual leader who said, "You guys are old-fashioned 'holiness.' We are modern-day 'grace.' You live in bondage, while we can do anything we want." Hill went on to say, "Pastors and teachers worldwide have succumbed to heretical teachings, including universal reconciliation, deification of man, challenging the validity of the Word of God including His judgments, and even lifting any boundaries, claiming His amazing grace is actually 'amazing freedom.' You are free to live according to your own desires. Sound familiar? *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*" (Judg. 17:6)."

What Are We Doing?

Are the "grace" proponents right? Is there no need to repent once we are believers? Hill says, "We must remember that Jesus came in grace and truth, not grace and grace." "...*Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (see John 1:14, 17).

The assault on truth presents a real challenge for the Church today. We know that truth is good. We know that truth is from God. The Bible says, "*You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32 NIV). What does this mean? We are set free from the power of sin, and now are free to live for God! We are not set free in order to party—in order to sin!

In this Israel Teaching Letter I want to try to answer a few questions. What is truth? Are there consequences for ignoring or disobeying the truth? How are we, as believers, to live our lives in the midst of a wider secular society which may not even accept the concept of truth? These are questions that many in the Christian world are wrestling with and are coming up with a variety of responses.

“Truth: one of the central qualities of Hashem, (literally “the name” and used to refer to the Tetragrammaton—YHWH—the personal name of God...”



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What is Truth?

This section will be a little complicated, but please stay with me. There are some important foundational truths to be understood from delving into the meaning of this word.

According to *Merriam–Webster*, truth is:

1. The real facts about something: the things that are true
2. The quality or state of being true
3. A statement or idea that is true or accepted as true

In the Bible the main Hebrew word translated “truth” is *emet* (אמת). *Strong’s Concordance* says that *emet* can be translated as truth, true, truly (in the vast majority of references). But it also is translated right, faithfully, faithful, assuredly, assured, establishment, sure and verity.

Interestingly it comes from the same root as *aman* (אמן: to support, confirm, faithful). *Amen* comes from this same root and has the connotation of affirmation of truth. *Emunah* (אמונה: faith, faithfulness) also comes from the same root. All these Hebrew words (*emet*, *aman*, *emunah*) are related words used to describe aspects of God’s character.

Marvin Wilson says, “When *Emunah* refers to God, it usually points to His utter dependability and unwavering faithfulness.” On the subject of *emet* Wilson says; “The Rabbis attributed special significance to *emet*. The *Talmud* [rabbinic

commentary] states the ‘the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is *emet*, (truth)’ (Sanhedrin 64a). The rabbis formulated various explanations for this divine seal... Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish [says]: ‘*Alef* (א) is the first letter of the alphabet, *Mem* (מ) is the middle letter, and *Tav* (ת) is the last as much as to say, “I the LORD am first” for I did not take over the rule from another; “and beside me there is no god,” for I have no partner; “and with the last I am He,” for I shall not hand over to another.’ (*Aleph*, *mem*, and *tav*, three consonants of the Hebrew alphabet spell *emet*, “truth”).”

On the Orthodox Union website (ou.org) we find an explanation for *emet*. “Truth: one of the central qualities of Hashem, [literally “the name” and used to refer to the Tetragrammaton—YHWH—the personal name of God identified by the capital letters LORD in our English Bibles] and one strongly emphasized and recommended for human behavior in the *Torah* [Gen.–Deut.]; as we say in the Prayer of Shema Yisrael, ‘Understand, O Israel, Hashem Elokeichem Emet, The L-rd, your G-d, is Truth;’” Jewish people never say the YHWH name which they view as too holy to utter, so they substitute Adonai (Lord) or Hashem (the name); many also leave vowels out of any reference to God to honor Him.

In many passages of Scripture God is identified with truth. The psalmist wrote: “*Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth*” (Ps. 31:5).

As Christians we remember the words of Yeshua when He said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6).

The Consequences of Not Heeding God’s Truth

In Deuteronomy 27–28 we find Moses exhorting the children of Israel to choose the way of blessing over the way of cursing. “*Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the LORD your God. Therefore you shall obey the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today*” (Deut. 27: 9, 10). What follows is an amazing passage outlining the blessings that come from obedience to God’s commandments, and the consequences that come from disobeying God’s commandments.

We all understand and acknowledge, perhaps reluctantly, that our choices—our actions—have consequences. For example, if I eat right and exercise I will enjoy better health. If I choose to eat poorly and not exercise, I will suffer the consequences. Chances are I will quickly get out of breath when climbing a hill or even the stairs. If I apply myself to education I will put myself in a better position to get a good job. If I drop out of school, it will most likely affect my future earning power. If I am sexually pure I will not contract STDs. If I am sexually promiscuous then I run the risk of consequences—venereal disease, out of wedlock pregnancy, etc. If I cheat on my taxes, I am likely to face the law with its penalties, fines and perhaps imprisonment.

Moses tells the people, to understand the truth of what God expects of His people and the benefits of following His way and the consequences of not following the commandments of God.

The Jewish people have identified 613 commandments (both positive and negative) in the *Torah*.

Christians will often say, "I am not under the law." By this they are saying they don't have to keep the laws of the *Torah*. But, did you know that in the Writings of the Apostles (NT) there are more than 1,000 commandments, both positive and negative! (See www.cai.org/bible-studies/1050-new-testament-commands)

Yeshua said, "*If you love Me keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). The Apostle John says something that is very strong! "*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*" (I John 2:3, 4).

What are His commandments? Most Christians will immediately tell you "Love God" and "love your neighbor," because Yeshua said these are the two greatest commandments (Mark 12:29–31). This is also recounted in Matthew 22:36–40, but in this passage Yeshua ends with the words, "*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*" Surely references to "His commandments" includes the more than 1,000 commandments found in the Writings of the Apostles!

Paul taught the young Timothy, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). There are a couple of things I think we need to recognize from this passage. First, when Paul refers to all Scripture, he was talking about the *Tanakh* (Gen.–Mal.), since the Writings of the Apostles (NT) were not yet canonized (that happened between AD 325–385).

Secondly, notice the words, "*reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness.*" Paul is writing to a believer and tells him that the Word of God will discipline him. In the next chapter of 2 Timothy we read these words, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables*" (2 Tim. 4:3–4, emphasis mine).

Fellow believers, I strongly encourage you to seek truth, not allowing your desires to cause you to ignore the parts of Scripture that you don't like. There are segments of the Church today who are fulfilling this passage. God forgive us for not taking His commandments seriously.

The Apostle Paul said, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?... Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts, and do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*" (Rom. 6:1–2, 11–13). Grace, that marvelous gift of

He is the Father
and He is the Judge.



God is not an excuse to continue in sin. By the way, grace is found throughout the *Tanakh* (Gen.–Mal.). The Hebrew word is *chen* (יָחַן) and it appears 69 times in the Hebrew text.

In Malachi 3:6, it says, “*I am the LORD, I do not change...*” What does that mean? My husband and I were talking the other day about the most important Hebrew words in the Bible and we quickly came up with a short list: *emet* (truth), *chen* (grace, favor), *chesed* (loving-kindness, mercy), *tzedek* (righteousness), *emunah* (faith, faithfulness), *mishpat* (justice), *ahava* (love), *shalom* (peace, wholeness) and *kodesh* (holiness). I am sure we will add more words as time goes on. Each of these words describes God. The God who says He does not change! He is a God of mercy, grace, love and He is also a God of righteousness, justice and truth. Only agreeing with the first three and leaving out the latter three is not sound doctrine. He is the Father and He is the Judge. These concepts are found throughout the Scripture: both the *Tanakh* and the Writings of the Apostles.

The Law of First Mention

Theologians (Christian and Jewish) take careful note of the first time a concept is mentioned in Scripture. The word *emet* (truth) appears the first time in the midst of the story of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, who is seeking a wife for Isaac. After finding Rivka (Rebecca) he rejoices in God. “*And he said, ‘Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy (chesed) and His truth (emet) toward my master. As for me, being on the way the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren’*” (Gen. 24:27).

Eliezer rejoices in two characteristics of God—*chesed* (a rich Hebrew word which is translated mercy, kindness, loving-kindness and goodness), and *emet* (truth, faithfulness).

After I noticed this, I went on a Bible search. I wondered how often these two concepts are linked. I found many such passages, which combine both *chesed* and *emet*—loving-kindness and truth.

In Exodus 34:6–7 God describes Himself to Moses, and two of the terms He uses are *chesed* and *emet*! “*And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in **goodness and truth** (chesed and emet), keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation’*” (emphasis added).

In this passage we see the mercy, grace and the goodness of God, and we see His commitment to truth and the consequences of sin.

It is God’s great desire that we would accept His offer of grace and mercy, and that the result would be a commitment to truth and righteousness. Consider this passage:

“*Mercy (chesed) and truth (emet) have met together; righteousness (tzedek) and peace (shalom) have kissed. Truth (emet) shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness (tzedek) shall look down from heaven. Yes, the LORD will give what is good (tov); and*



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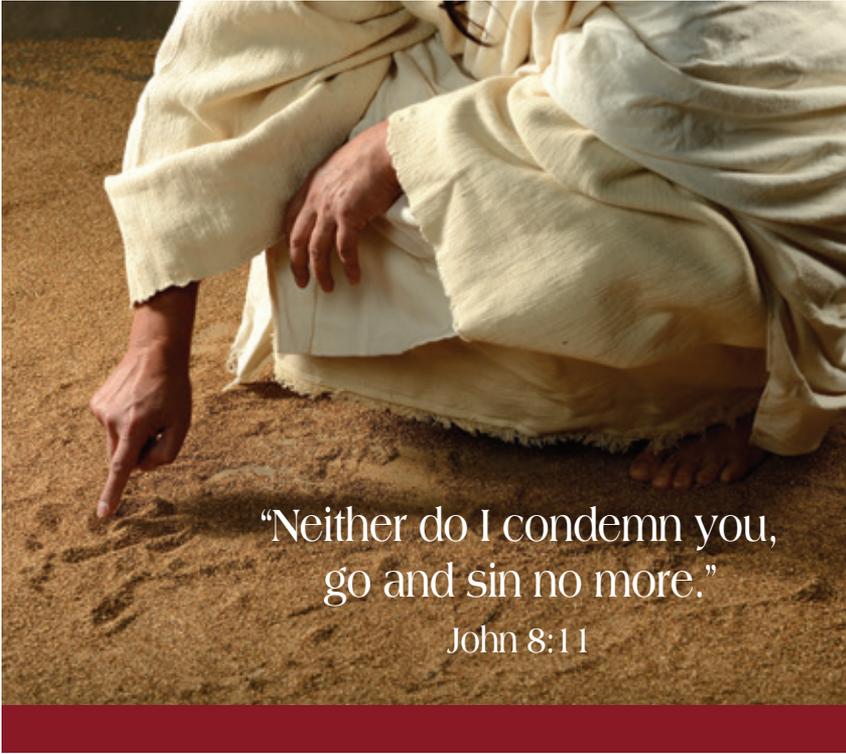
our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway” (Ps. 85:10–13).

We see this same combination of concepts in the book of Ephesians when it says, “but, speaking the **truth in love**, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth in the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:15–16 emphasis mine).

The Whole Counsel of God

In Acts chapter 20 Paul says that he has declared the “*whole counsel of God*.” Can today’s Christian leaders proclaim the same thing?

Dr. Billy Graham in “Things God Hates,” said, “We in the church have failed to remind this generation that while God is love, He also has the capacity to hate.



“Neither do I condemn you,
go and sin no more.”

John 8:11

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He hates sin, and He will judge it with the fierceness of His wrath. This generation is schooled in the teaching about an indulgent soft-hearted God whose judgments are uncertain and who coddles those who break His commandments. This generation finds it difficult to believe that God hates sin...He loathes with a holy abhorrence anything that would hinder our being reconciled to Him.”

Recently a Christian young adult said emotionally to an older group of believers, “Don’t judge me. Listen to me. Love me.” I agree, we are not the judges of anyone. But, that doesn’t mean there isn’t a judge. Each of us will be judged according to what we have done with God’s truth, His commandments.

What a blessing that God has described His character using both the words *chesed* (mercy, loving-kindness, goodness) and truth! I often have heard that we should love the sinner and hate the sin. I agree wholeheartedly. We cannot say that there is no such thing as truth or sin. But we can also love the one who has been trapped in the consequences of their behavior. God’s desire is to love them, and see them delivered.

Yeshua when He encountered the woman caught in adultery, said “*Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more*” (John 8:11). In another instance Yeshua had healed a man, and afterwards said to him, “*See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you*” (John 5:14). This is not to say that sin is the root of all illness. When Yeshua healed the blind man, His disciples asked who had sinned

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?”

Matt. 5:13



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resulting in his blindness and Yeshua responded, *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him”* (John 9:3).

In an article written after the horrific murders at a gay club in Florida, many wrote about the proper response for Christians. I came across an article by John Stonestreet which said, *“...in times like these, where any sort of moral truth claim is determined up front to be guilty by association. It is in this cultural moment that our most effective apologetic will be a **life of love united with the truth** of who Christ is (emphasis mine).”*

“Now we’ll be told that truth and love cannot really fit together, that we choose one at the expense of the other. We must not allow that thinking in our hearts and minds. Jesus Christ, the center of history, is Himself truth and is Himself love. The tension between the two is resolved in Him.”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua gave instruction regarding our lifestyle as believers, *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matt. 5:13–16).

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Where does a light shine the brightest? In dark places! In the midst of a world living in sin, we need to be shining lights of God's goodness, grace and truth. We need to model the life of Yeshua who when encountering sin, loved the sinner, and freely forgave, but also said, "go and sin no more."

Some believers major in truth (*emet*) and others major in loving-kindness (*chesed*), but what we really need are believers who will live a life that values truth and are committed to love at the same time.



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Scripture is taken from the New King James, unless otherwise noted.



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