

# ACCOUNTABILITY

## *in deeds, words, and thoughts*

by Mark Huey

Recently during our annual trek through the Torah portions, my study of *Pedukei* (Exodus 38:21-40:36) initiated a deeper study into the subject of accountability. In this *parashah*, the mustering or accounting of the materials used for the construction of the Tabernacle was detailed. Keeping an accurate account of the physical aspects of the Tabernacle was admirable during Moses' era, but what is personally more important to consider from the distance of 3,300 years, is the aspect of **individual accountability** that every human being will encounter during the course of a lifetime. I often find that as I examine the Torah, the Holy Spirit will prompt me into a deeper search, so that His sanctifying grace would continue to mold my heart and character. It is amazing how the Word of God can have such a motivating impact on your heart, as I recently found that the intentions of my heart were being laid bare before the Holy One of Israel. As the author of Hebrews articulates,

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to **judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do**” (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Reviewing *Pedukei* several weeks ago, I was led to reflect upon some important words given by Yeshua to His Disciples:

“Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come. Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? **For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.** The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. **But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned**” (Matthew 12:32-37).

At the end of these verses, I found myself repeating the statement “every careless word” or “every idle word” (KJV) over and over again. The clear emphasis is that every person must use the tongue wisely. Interestingly, when you find yourself audibly speaking the Word of God, you also find yourself hearing the Word as it reverberates in the room off of the walls. Hearing the echoes of “every careless word,” such piercing aspects began to convict me of my own failings in terms of my tongue. In trying to exhort an audience of people, I actually found myself being humbled by memories of my own failings regarding my use of careless words. I thought of mumbling under my breath the thought “idiots” or “fools” when it comes to some of the people that I know and have to interact with.

While I have been able to control outbursts of epithets that are audible, I still recognize that my thoughts regarding certain people in certain situations have ushered forth opinions that were definitely in my heart. Quickly thinking back to what Yeshua states about calling someone a fool as equivalent to *murder*, just compounded the conviction in my heart:

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go into the fiery hell*” (Matthew 5:21-22).

In my thought life, I have found myself not making a distinction between someone doing something idiotic or foolish, versus attributing the status of being an idiot or fool to that person and thus being worthless in the eyes of God. Even though I have not spoken such things loud enough for anyone to hear, I have certainly made judgments in my heart that certain people were fools or good-for-nothings. In a matter of seconds during a presentation where I was trying to teach others, I sincerely felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit. As a continuing process of the sanctification that I desire, I decided to briefly comment on the subject of being accountable for our words or thoughts—which inevitably led me to expand my review into what the Scriptures say about our deeds. This expansion of my study uncovered so many verses that for the purposes of this article, I am simply going to let the references speak for themselves.

In searching out God’s Word, I have found that our personal accountability for actions can be broken down into our: deeds, words, and our thoughts. Amazingly, our omniscient Heavenly Father is recording everything that we do, say, or even think in some sort of celestial filing system. Just the thought of this has prompted me to start making choices about more than my visible deeds, and perhaps verbal comments, to the point of initiating a concerted effort to work on my thought life.

Consider some of the words of Job and the Psalmist, concepts which we find repeated by Yeshua and Paul:

“For He [God] pays a man according to his work, and makes him find it according to his way” (Job 34:11).

“Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God; and lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, for You recompense a man according to his work” (Psalm 62:11-12).

“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS [Psalm 62:12]” (Matthew 16:27).

“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS [Psalm 62:12]” (Romans 2:6-7)

In Paul's instruction to the Corinthians, he elaborates on the aspect of accountability before the *bēma* (βῆμα) or "judgment seat of Messiah":

"For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but *are* giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have *an answer* for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Messiah controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Messiah according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, *he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come*" (2 Corinthians 5:1-17).

Of course, being new creatures in the Lord should evidence itself in what comes out of our mouths. Each human being is going to stand before Yeshua, and it is up to each of us whether the judgment He issues be *positive or negative*. Those who are judged worthy of entering into His Kingdom are obviously those who have repented of their sins and have experienced the goodness of His grace.

There are scores of admonitions throughout the Scriptures, particularly proverbs, which speak about the tongue and what ushers forth from one's mouth. Recognizing that we will all be held accountable for our words, it is critical to implement self-control of our tongues. Here are just a few examples that have really struck me, concluding with the original words of Yeshua which prompted this personal review. Note the aspect of accountability in these verses:

"An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous will escape from trouble. **A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, and the deeds of a man's hands will return to him**" (Proverbs 12:13-14).

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly. The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good. A

soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit" (Proverbs 15:1-4).

"A brother offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a citadel. With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied; he will be satisfied *with* the product of his lips. **Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit**" (Proverbs 18:19-21).

"He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23).

**"For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.** The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. **But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned**" (Matthew 12:34b-37).

As you can read, Yeshua the Messiah was very aware of the problems associated with the tongue and mouth, and particularly careless or useless words that are often spoken by people. But here in unequivocal terms, a connection is made between words spoken and what is in the heart. This is where the very thoughts of a person, perhaps ushering forth from the heart, are considered. In other places in the Synoptic Gospels, Yeshua declares that what is in the heart is actually what generates all sorts of defiling activities in men and women:

"And He was saying, 'That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man'" (Mark 7:20-23).

"Yeshua said, 'Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man'" (Matthew 15:16-20).

When you go back and consider some of the texts that deal with the thoughts of people, you are reminded that generally speaking, human thoughts are not necessarily good. Consider some of these reminders:

"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, **and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.** The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them'" (Genesis 6:5-7).

Obviously, these thoughts were wicked, but recall that God remembers all thoughts:

"The LORD knows the thoughts of man, that they are a *mere* breath" (Psalm 94:11).

King David understood God's omniscience, and even prays that Solomon's thoughts would have the proper intentions as he was chosen to build the Temple to the Almighty:

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; **for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts.** If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever. Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act" (1 Chronicles 28:9-10).

However, Jeremiah reminds us of the deceitfulness of the heart that does not seek after God, and how He will hold unrepentant people accountable for their thoughts and deeds:

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit. **The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds**" (Jeremiah 17:7-10).

Proverbs details the dilemma that we face between those consumed with wicked and evil thoughts, versus those who are consumed with righteousness:

"**The thoughts of the righteous are just, but the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.** The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright will deliver them. The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand. A man will be praised according to his insight, but one of perverse mind will be despised" (Proverbs 12:5-8).

According to Isaiah, our Creator's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Yet, as His followers we can work toward thinking in a manner that is pleasing to Him. We can repent of our ungodly ways, with the clear expectation that He will pardon our iniquities:

"Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. **Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.** For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:6-9).

Each of us who claims a saving knowledge of Messiah Yeshua has a choice to work on not only his or her deeds and words—but also our very thoughts. As the following parable reminds us, **to whom much is given, much is required:**

"And the Lord said, 'Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, "My master will be a long time in coming," and begins to beat the slaves, *both* men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master

of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. **From everyone who has been given much, much will be required: and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more**" (Luke 12:42-48).

As Yeshua was delivering this parable, He was admonishing His Disciples about the requirement for them to be accomplishing the Father's business. Believers are reminded of what we have been given when we consider above all, the gift of eternal life and the forgiveness for our sins—be those sins found in deeds, words, or even thoughts. This redemption above all is something that even King David looked forward to during his lifetime:

*"A Psalm of David. A Maskil. How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah"* (Psalm 32:1-5).

But did you notice that King David was cognizant of his need to acknowledge and confess his sin—knowing that the Holy One would forgive him of his sin? The Apostle Paul quotes from Psalm 32 when trying to describe to the Romans the concept of justification by faith, just like the Patriarch Abraham:

*"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS' [Genesis 15:6]. Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT' [Psalm 32:1]. Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, 'FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS'"* (Romans 4:1-9).

Placing one's total trust in Yeshua's redeeming work at Golgotha (Calvary) is the key to the walk of faith that puts Believers above the challenges of condemnation for every deed, word, or even thought that would warrant God's wrath and judgment. However, later in Paul's epistle, he reminds his readers that there should definitely be some evidence of the walk in the Spirit, by putting to death the deeds of the flesh that are caused by sin:

*"So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by*

the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*" (Romans 8:12-17).

In Paul's letter to the Galatians he declares some of the great distinctions between deeds of the flesh that come from sinful behavior, and what are commonly known as the fruit of the Spirit that come from a transformed heart. I think it is good to re-read these words and simply make an account of where each of us presently is in relation to these different actions, words, or thoughts. After all, as you read down the list, you will note that we are each to personally examine our own walks of faith in order not to be deceived, but let me add, in order to check that we are truly being sanctified by God:

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Messiah Yeshua have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Messiah. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. **But each one must examine his own work**, and then he will have *reason for* boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one will bear his own load. The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Galatians 5:19-6:10).

If a person is exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, then one is truly following "the Torah of Messiah" and living the way that He has modeled for us.

Finally, let us always be reminded of the power of God's grace that has saved us all from our sin. Perhaps no better summation of what has been done for us is recorded by Paul in his letter to Titus:

"But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing

by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Yeshua the Messiah our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things **I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men**" (Titus 3:4-9).

I would be remiss to not make one final observation, which I myself was made aware of in my examination of accountability for our deeds, words, and thoughts. Consider what we are told in the Book of Revelation about the Great White Throne judgment of the Messiah. When I read this passage, I am struck by the absolute need for someone to have his or her name clearly penned in the Book of Life. If not, as the passage concludes, the consequences are devastating:

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15).

Here, we see that the condemned unrighteous are judged by the Lord according to their deeds, and the degree of punishment they receive in the Lake of Fire varies accordingly. None of us should find ourselves judged by our deeds in such a way—but only receive rewards for the acts of goodness and faith we have performed when we stand before Him!

It is absolutely critical that each one of us continually follow the advice of the balance of the Scriptures I have listed. I know that for me as a result of this study, I am conscientiously and volitionally choosing to pray for people rather than to think unpleasant thoughts about them because of actions I witness. Hopefully in time by practicing this action, my thought life will be conformed even more to the image of the Messiah (Romans 8:29), as God works in and through me by the power of His Holy Spirit. It is my prayer that I will learn to look at other people the way my Heavenly Father sees them—creatures made in His image (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6; James 3:9) possessing great value.

My friends, seek Him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength! Pray that as you so do this, your deeds, words, and even thoughts will not only be forgiven, but that over time, will be clear evidence that you indeed know Him. More importantly, be sure that the King of Kings knows you! Praise Him that His accounts are never out of order!