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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Switzerland votes overwhelmingly to jail citizens for ‘homophobia,’ ‘transphobia’

BERN, Switzerland, October 9, 2018 (LifeSiteNews) – By an almost two-to-one vote met with ringing approval by pro-LGBT groups, the National Council of Switzerland voted this month on a measure to criminalize “homophobia” and “discrimination.”



The National Council, which is the lower house of the country’s bicameral legislature, voted 118-60 in favor of national councilor Mathias Reynard’s initiative, the Swiss newspaper Le Temps reports. Five members abstained from the vote.

The country’s Criminal Code currently bans “incitement to hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons on the basis of their ‘racial, ethnic or religious’ affiliation,” the paper explains, punishable by a fine or up to three years in prison. Reynard’s proposal would add “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to that list.

“Homophobia is not an opinion,” Reynard declares. “It’s a crime. One in five homosexuals attempted suicide, half before the age of 20. This victory sends a strong signal.” Organizations such as Pink Cross and websites such as PinkNews are celebrating his victory.

In an interview with ShortList published last week, the heterosexual Reynard said he was driven to act by LGBT friends who have suffered from “verbal” homophobic violence in addition to physical attacks, and the discovery that “Swiss case-law doesn’t punish either hate speech or incitement to hatred towards LGBT+ people.”

Councilor Yves Nidegger challenged the measure, however. He warned that the categories being criminalized are “legally problematic and indefinable” and questioning whether “pedophilia, bisexuality, gerontophilia, necrophilia, and so on - creativity in this area being inexhaustible - are sexual orientations that must be protected or not protected.” Notably, this crackdown on so-called “hate speech” critical of homosexuality or transgenderism precedes same-sex “marriage” in Switzerland. Homosexual unions aren’t currently recognized, but Reynard says he wants to tackle that fight next.

26 countries around the world currently recognize same-sex “marriages,” including 21 of the European Union’s 28 member states. The United Kingdom has similar laws on the books against “hate,” something the United Nations has attempted to pressure other nations into adopting.

Moscow rejects notion of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan

Two days after Netanyahu said Putin understands the territory's importance for Israel, Russian FM says any change of status would violate UN resolution

By RAPHAEL AHREN 10 October 2018, 3:27 pm 22

His comments followed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's call on the international community Monday to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, saying Russian President Vladimir Putin appreciates how important the strategic plateau is for Israel.

"The status of the Golan Heights is determined by the resolutions of the UN Security Council," Lavrov told reporters in Moscow. "Changing this status bypassing the Security Council, from my perspective, would be a direct violation of these resolutions."

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria during the 1967 Six Day War, and formally annexed the territory in 1981. UN Security Council Resolution 497 of that year declared that Israel's annexation of the "occupied Syrian Golan Heights is null and void and without international legal effect." It passed unanimously.

The status of the #GolanHeights is determined by the resolutions of the #UN Security Council. Changing this status bypassing the Security Council, from my perspective, would be a direct violation of these resolutions, Foreign Minister Sergey #Lavrov said <https://bit.ly/2OeaCgG>

During a visit to a synagogue at the Ein Keshatot archaeological site on the Golan Heights, Netanyahu vowed never to retreat from the area.

"Israel on the Golan Heights is a guarantee of stability in the surrounding area," he said, noting Iran's efforts to establish itself militarily close to Israel's border with Syria.

"Israel on the Golan Heights is a solid reality based on ancient rights. Israel on the Golan Heights is a fact that the international community must recognize and as long as it is up to me the Golan Heights will always remain under Israeli sovereignty because otherwise we would have Iran and Hezbollah on the shores of the Sea of Galilee," he added.

Netanyahu said he would discuss Iran's malign influence in the region during his upcoming meeting with the Russian president.

"I know that President Putin understands my commitment to the security of Israel and I know that he also understands the importance that I ascribe to the Golan Heights, that we all ascribe to the Golan Heights and to the heritage of Israel."

Israel's claim to the Golan Heights is widely accepted among Jewish Israelis. Opposition MK Yair Lapid, for instance, praised the prime minister for his comments, saying that he will fully back any government initiative to secure international support for Israel's annexation of the territory. Relations between Israel and Russia have been suffering recently due to the accidental Syrian downing of a Russian plane during an Israeli airstrike in Syria. Fifteen Russians were killed in the September 17 incident, which Moscow blamed on Israel, accusing its pilots of using the larger Russian plane as cover.

Israel disputes the Russian findings and says its jets were back in Israeli airspace when the plane was downed. In response, Moscow announced new measures to protect its military in Syria, and sent Damascus S-300 air defense systems.

The odd reality of life under China's all-seeing credit score system

Looking for love? In China, a good credit score could get you access to exclusive singles

By CHARLES ROLLET

In the UK, credit scores are mostly used to determine whether people can get a credit card or loan. But in China, the government is developing a much broader “social credit” system partly based on people’s routine behaviours with the ultimate goal of determining the “trustworthiness” of the country’s 1.4 billion citizens.

It might sound like a futuristic dystopian nightmare but the system is already a reality. Social credit is preventing people from buying airline and train tickets, stopping social gatherings from happening, and blocking people from going on certain dating websites. Meanwhile, those viewed kindly are rewarded with discounted energy bills and similar perks.

China's social credit system was launched in 2014 and is supposed to be nationwide by 2020. As well as tracking and rating individuals, it also encompasses businesses and government officials. When it is complete, every Chinese citizen will have a searchable file of amalgamated data from public and private sources tracking their social credit. Currently, the system is still under development and authorities are trying to centralise local databases.

Given the Chinese government's authoritarian nature, some portray the system as a single, all-knowing Orwellian surveillance machine that will ensure every single citizen’s strict loyalty to the Communist Party. But for now, that's not quite the case. Rogier Creemers, a researcher in the law and governance of China at Leiden University, has described the social credit setup as an "ecosystem" of fragmented initiatives. The main goal, he says, is not stifling dissent – something the Chinese state already has many tools for at its disposal – but better managing social order while leaving the Party firmly in charge.

Yet social credit isn't limited to the government and for the most part it has been operated by private firms. Ant Financial, the finance arm of e-commerce giant Alibaba, launched a product called Sesame Credit in 2015. It was China’s first effective credit scoring system but was also much broader, functioning as a social credit scheme and loyalty programme as well.

Along with providing preferential loans, a high Sesame Credit score – which ranges from 350 to 950 – can result in a huge variety of benefits, like no-deposit apartment and bicycle rentals. While the system is undoubtedly popular, the line between private social credit schemes and the government is being increasingly blurred. China’s supreme court, for example, shares a “blacklist” of people who haven’t paid court fines with Sesame Credit, which in turn deducts users’ scores until they sort out they pay up.

As both the private and public components of social credit expand in China, there’s legitimate concern the system will end up creating an “IT-backed authoritarianism” unlike any other. One independent journalist has already been barred from buying plane tickets because of court fees related to his work, for example.

But, for now, it remains grimly captivating to see the benefits and rewards created by such an ambitious and potentially dystopian project. Here are some lesser-known examples of the social credit system’s real-life applications, from hospitals to K-pop.

Jumping healthcare waiting lists

China’s hospitals, long notorious for stifling bureaucracy, are currently experimenting with social credit

systems. In a bid to reduce wait times by up to 60 per cent, Sesame Credit is giving users with a score above 650 a 1,000-yuan (£117) credit at one Shanghai university hospital, letting them see a doctor without lining up to pay. The scheme is set to expand to hospitals in 10 more Chinese cities. But social credit is also being used to punish some patients and practitioners. Last year, Chinese health authorities announced that people guilty of violence against medical workers – a significant problem in China thanks to poor malpractice policies – would be placed on the country’s national social credit blacklist. Also added to the blacklist were those running illegal plastic surgery outfits.

Punishments in virtual worlds

In 2015, Sesame Credit executive Li Yingun said playing 10 hours of video games a day would get a lower credit score than a responsible parent buying loads of diapers. But playing video games can lower your Sesame Credit score in a much more direct way – if you cheat.

Chinese citizens signing up for the wildly popular multiplayer shooter game Counter Strike Global Offensive must register using both their national ID and Sesame Credit score, according to state media outlet CGTN, and anyone caught using cheating software like ‘Aimbots’ which ensure perfect aim will have their Sesame Credit scores deducted, potentially affecting their real-life ability to get loans. “It’s the worst punishment in history,” Li Haiyi, vice president of Chinese game developer Perfect World, told CGTN.

Rabid K-pop fans be warned. After obsessed fans caused serious delays at Beijing’s airport several times by rushing to meet their idols – including one incident where they managed to break into first-class – Chinese authorities passed a regulation that makes it possible to lower the social credit record of anyone found to have disrupted or blocked check-in counters and airport corridors.

Until then, fans were able to get away with their antics thanks to their large numbers and the fact that they bought cheap refundable tickets to enter secure areas, according to Chinese media reports. The new regulation also includes a potential one-year ban from flying and social credit penalties for a host of other bad behaviours, from forging boarding passes to stealing suitcases.

In China, a high credit score can help you find a date. Zhenai.com, a dating service with 140 million users which is partly-owned by the American parent company behind Tinder, gives users with high Sesame Credit scores better visibility on their website. And in a Tinder-like move, dating giant Baihe.com lets users with high Sesame Credit show off their score to members of the opposite sex as long as they agree to display their scores as well. Sometimes, though, mixing up social credit and dating goes too far. In late 2016, Alipay launched a new feature on its app called Circles which created women-only groups where only men with Sesame Credit scores over 750 could comment on women’s posts – which they immediately did, mostly by asking for sex. The feature was widely-derided as digital prostitution – one blogger called it “Alipimp” – and it was soon taken down.

Skipping deposits for rentals

Good credit can make city living significantly easier in China. In some cities, people with high Sesame Credit scores can check into hotels, rent umbrellas, and even rent cars without paying a deposit. But it’s not all about the rewards. Chinese cities piloting government-run social credit systems punish a wide range of activities, potentially causing travel and government service restrictions. Recently the names of 169 people who have been banned from buying travel tickets were published by the government.

In the eastern city of Suzhou, for example, bus fare evasion, posting fake product reviews online, not paying your electric bill, and booking a room in a hotel without showing up all cause deductions in the city’s 200-point social credit system. Possibly to make Suzhou’s program feel a bit less Orwellian, the scheme is named after a flower popularly used in teas and cakes.

Banning social gatherings

In a sign that the government is using the social credit system to deepen its control civil society, social credit is being harnessed to crack down on “illegal social organisations.” The Ministry of Civil Affairs has announced it would take measures to blacklist people involved in such organisations, which were claimed to be largely fraudulent or copycat associations often using vague names in their titles like “international” to swindle people. The regulation state that one’s social credit would be affected if they were found to be involved in running such an organisation. But what makes a “social organisation” legal or illegal in China sometimes has a lot to do with its political stance. China has cracked down on foreign-funded NGOs, while the same ministry attacking “illegal social organisations” recently required that the legal ones include Communist Party “building” in their charters to “ensure their correct political direction”.

Since 2015 China’s supreme court has shared a ‘blacklist’ of millions of people who defaulted on their court fines with Sesame Credit. In turn, Sesame Credit lowers these users’ scores and even bars them from making luxury purchases on the Alibaba-owned online marketplaces TaoBao and Tmall.

The system could go much further in the future. Thanks to the ubiquity of mobile payments in China, frequent debtors could eventually be barred from attempting to “buy breakfast, take a bus and look for jobs,” one Chinese academic told China Daily. While that seems extreme, one woman in 2017 did get plastic surgery to escape debts worth 25 million yuan (about £2.9 million).

Hebrew Roots and the Leaven of Works Salvation Part 2

McMahon, T.A.Fisher, G. Richard

*I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.
—Galatians:2:21*

There is a great amount of “frustrating the grace of God” by those involved in the Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM), primarily due to a lack of understanding regarding the difference between the Covenant of Law and the New Covenant of Grace. We celebrate this difference when we partake of communion. An all-inclusive explanation is beyond the scope of these two articles, but there are clarifying points that can be made in brief. Beginning with Galatians:2:21, we see that righteousness cannot come “by the law,” nor do salvation and sanctification. Just as salvation is the gift of God, so too is righteousness: “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Romans:5:17-18). As H. A. Ironside noted, “We are not only freed from the law as a means of attempting to secure justification, but are also freed from the law as a means of sanctification.”

Matthew:28:20 is clear: as we disciple others, we are to teach them everything that Jesus commanded (a huge responsibility), not everything that Moses commanded. The believer in Christ who looks to the law as a means of righteousness is in serious error. All the righteous requirements of the law are not fulfilled by us but are fulfilled in us by Jesus Christ, who satisfied the requirements of the law for and in every believer (Romans:8:1-4). Christ fully completed every righteous requirement of the Law, and He gives that victory and standing to His followers. Swedish theologian Anders Nygren writes, “They who are ‘in Christ’ are by that very fact righteous, and not by a keeping of the law made possible by that fact. Their righteousness consists in the fact...that they no longer live of themselves but ‘are in Christ.’ Therein, and not through any keeping of the law is the righteousness of the law fulfilled” (Romans:10:4 - see also Galatians:3:24-26).

In AD 70, the Temple in Jerusalem was completely destroyed. First-century Judaism died. In the fourth

century, there was an aborted attempt at rebuilding the temple by Emperor Julian. We know from Scripture that when Jesus was sacrificed on the Cross, He, as the Lamb of God, satisfied the eternal penalty for mankind's sin, and at that point He rendered the Temple and the priesthood obsolete (Hebrews:8:7-13 ; 10:1-9; 12:26-29). When Jesus cried, "It is finished," He meant that not only was redemption complete but, as a result, biblical Judaism had completed that for which it was intended. Jesus alone was the focal point of salvation. The ripping in two of the Temple veil as Christ gave up His spirit (Matthew:27:51) signified that He had accomplished what the Old Testament had prophesied. Christ's death both fulfilled and ended the function of the biblical practices of Judaism with its temple, sacrifices, and priesthood. The way into the Holy of Holies and the very presence of God was now open and available to all. The Hebrew Roots Movement, however, seems to want to sew the temple veil back together.

To that end, in order for the religion of Judaism to continue without a Temple or a sacrifice or a priesthood, it had to be totally revamped to compensate for its losses. Israel's way to God no longer existed. A new way had to be cobbled together. Old Testament requirements, additional traditions, modifications, and contributions from leading rabbis, were put together in documents known as the Mishnah (AD 200), the Jerusalem Talmud (AD 400) and the Babylonian Talmud (AD 500). The Talmud, with its more than twenty volumes containing input from hundreds of rabbis, is the book that dictates much of Jewish religious life today. Jewish Midrash consists of paraphrases of Scripture and Rabbinical commentaries. These are an added component in latter-day Judaism. The Talmud, however, is the chief source of its practices and beliefs, and a large portion of Talmudic practice is found within the Hebrew Roots Movement.

A notable exception would be the Jews who are called Karaites. They reject in total the Talmud and ultra-orthodox Judasim (calling it Phariseeism) and use only the Old Testament—period. The brilliant Hebrew Christian Alfred Edersheim said that applying the Talmud to Christianity was a huge mistake and that the Talmud had follies and superstitions of former days that needed to be refuted (Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 1, page VIII).

Many in the HRM claim to be "Torah observant" (living according to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), when what they actually are is Talmud observant. Adherents of the HRM believe that they are following biblical customs when, in fact, they are recreating later practices and even medieval traditions. For example, the wearing of the yarmulke or kippa (a type of skull cap) by Jewish men is a human tradition with no basis in the Law of Moses. Another apparent necessity in the HRM is the wearing of what is called a "prayer shawl," also called a Tallit, a Hebrew term that is found in the Talmud but nowhere is there evidence of such a practice in the Hebrew Old Testament. The widespread practice of interpreting Talmud content as though it were true to biblical content creates misinformed Jews. Among HRM followers there is a serious lack of searching out the genuine biblical roots of their beliefs and practices, including the aforementioned erroneous belief that the Gospel of Matthew, and perhaps the other three Gospels, were first written in Hebrew. More critical, it seems, is the lack of understanding of the Old Testament versus the New Testament, and the concept of Law versus grace.

The New Testament in every way surpasses the Old Testament, spiritually and functionally. John Reisinger explains: "The whole subject is as clear as crystal the moment we see that Christ established a New Covenant that replaces the Old Covenant, and that the New Covenant brings with it new and higher laws of conduct that are based entirely on grace. These new laws are just as objective as any law under the Old Covenant. These objective commands can demand a kind of behavior that Moses could never demand simply because these new laws are based upon truth and power of grace." The Old Testament reaches its intended goal in Christ, and that fullness and fulfillment is given to believers by virtue of Christ in them (Galatians:2:20-21). Living it out can take place only by the enablement of the Holy Spirit's indwelling those who have been born again. As Lewis Sperry Chafer points out, "The law of Moses presents a covenant of works to be wrought in the energy of the flesh; the teachings of grace present a covenant of faith to be wrought in the energy of the Spirit." In other words, Grace empowers us while the Law condemns us.

Many who participate in the HRM may not realize that in their misplaced zeal to draw nearer to God they are actually moving in the opposite direction. They keep bits and pieces of the law, with neither rhyme nor reason for their choices, as they ignore or avoid the judgments meted out by the law. The law is an entirely unified system much like a seamless garment. One cannot arbitrarily keep what one wants and ignore the rest. That is simply “cafeteria Judaism,” as if the law were a pick-and-choose smorgasbord. James:2:10 is clear: “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” The law confronts us with the fact that we need mercy and grace found in Jesus alone.

Sadly, those of the Hebrew Roots Movement understand neither law nor grace, and are unwittingly fulfilling what Hebrews:2:1 warns against: “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” The current slippage includes major doctrinal errors by HRM leaders, e.g., those involved with Dual Covenant salvation.

Dual covenant teaching promotes the belief that Gentiles are saved through Jesus, and Jews are saved without Jesus, presumably under the Mosaic or Abrahamic Covenant as they try to keep the various parts of the Law of Moses. Those who recognize the impossibility of keeping the law respond that nevertheless Jews by birth are automatically and unconditionally saved. If that were the case, why would Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declare regarding his kinsmen, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Romans:10:1)? Paul is clear that the Gospel is for the Jews (Romans:1:16) first and foremost. Furthermore, John writes, “But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John:1:12-13). Scripture is absolutely clear: Jesus is the only way for Jew or Gentile to be saved (John:14:6; Acts:4:12). Grace trumps race.

The drift away from the Word of God—and especially the New Covenant—has become a flood within the HRM. Its affinity for Judaism screams for an answer to the question we brought up earlier—which Judaism? Is it Orthodox, Reform (Progressive), Conservative, New Age, or any of the other sects and subdivisions of Judaism? This question is not being answered in the HRM let alone even being asked. None of these subcultures in Judaism represent biblical Judaism, nor do they come even close. Superstitions, divination, necromancy, and kabbalistic practices abound. Modern Judaism in all of its forms is monotheistic (and in some cases agnostic) and rejects the essential scriptural doctrine of the Trinity.

Where the HRM yearns for legitimate Old Testament practices, it misses the all-important fact that they were only a shadow of things to come. All of the types pointing to those things have been completely accomplished by Jesus. Yet followers are taught that such things are spiritually efficacious and therefore necessary for the Gentile believer today. Not so. “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come...” (Colossians:2:16-17). Notice that verse 16 includes feast days and the Sabbath as insubstantial shadows; how much more then are the non-shadow paraphernalia derived from nonbiblical traditions and customs, e.g., yarmulkes, prayer shawls, modes of dress, twisted payots (side curls), Western Wall prayers, red strings on the wrist, shofars, etc. For the Jew, these things have some supposed spiritual value even though they are not by God’s instruction. According to Scripture, employing unbiblical practices in an attempt to gain spiritual merit opens the practitioner to dire consequences—perhaps not as dramatic as what took place in the lives and “strange fire” deaths of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus:10:1), but nothing good can come from approaching God by using man’s ways.

Adherents of the Hebrew Roots Movement are attracted to things of the Law and to an obsolete Judaism, both past and present. Some early connections include cultish doctrines such as are found in Seventh-Day Adventism, with its penchant for selective laws, and the Worldwide Church of God (WWCG). Dean Wheelock, who trademarked Hebrew Roots in the mid-1990s and publishes a magazine under that name, was educated at the WWCG’s Ambassador College. He left the WWCG, yet declared, “Most of what I

learned from that organization, I still hold to [i.e., laws].” Joe Kovacs is an executive editor for WorldNetDaily (WND), a major promoter of the HRM (WND offers a luxury Alaskan cruise coming this fall featuring Hebrew Roots’ writer Mark Biltz). Kovacs’s writings feature the theology of the late Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the Worldwide Church of God (See TBC article: <https://goo.gl/m1zk1C>).

In its erroneous endeavors, the HRM has drifted away (if indeed it was ever there) from the Church, the bride and body of Christ which comprises Jews and Gentiles. Galatians:3:28 makes that clear: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Colossians:3:11 confirms that the new believer in Christ is “neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all.” Elwood McQuaid reminds us, “Today’s church is a body of twin remnants of Jews and Gentiles. It is not a Gentile institution; and when a Jewish person becomes a believer in Jesus, he or she does not become a Gentile. Nor, for that matter, is it an extension of Judaism. Gentiles are not transformed into Jews, nor do they become a new branch or extension of Judaism. The church is unique.”

The HRM confuses both Jews and those in the church. The movement becomes something of a hybrid that is neither Judaism nor Christianity. It is a charade of both Judaism and Christianity. It has synagogues that are not synagogues, rabbis that are not rabbis, and anachronistically mixes Talmudic traditions with New Testament concepts and words, thus creating a new religious belief system and practice. Both sides are very confused. Its elitism is illusory; its pretended insights and superiority are often imaginary. In summary, the HRM is a form of manmade spirituality and therefore stands in opposition to the Word of God.

How might we minister to those who have become involved with the Hebrew Roots Movement? Although conditions of engagement may be very different at times, involving family members, or friends, or those in leadership who are believers, we must recognize that any change of their hearts can be accomplished only by the Holy Spirit who alone can bring about repentance. Nevertheless, we can be used of the Holy Spirit to explain what the HRM teaches and how it is contrary to Scripture. Paul instructs us regarding biblical correction: “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Timothy:2:24-26). We are to be steadfast not strident, gentle, patient, teaching with meekness, and most of all remembering that only God can bring them to “the acknowledging of the truth.” Finally, and most important, our endeavor on their behalf must be supported by unceasing prayer (1 Thessalonians:5:17; Hebrews 4:16)