

WORKS OF THE LAW

By Dr James Trimm

The term "works of the Law" has shown up as a technical theological term used in a document in the Dead Sea Scrolls called MMT which says:

Now we have written to you some of the WORKS OF THE LAW, those which we determined would be beneficial for you... And it will be reckoned to you as righteousness, in that you have done what is right and good before Him...(4QMMT (4Q394-399) Section C lines 26b-31)

Thus Sha'ul's opponents who believed in justification (righteousness and justification are the same word in Hebrew) thru "works of the Law" have materialized.

"The Nazarenes... accept Messiah in such a way that they do not cease to observe the old law..." (Jerome; On Isaiah 8:14; 4th Century)

They (the Nazarenes) have no different ideas, but confess everything exactly as the Law proclaims it and in the Jewish fashion-- except for their belief in Messiah... but since they are still fettered by the Law-- circumcision, the Sabbath, and the rest-- they are not in accord with Christians. (Epiphanius; Panarion 29; 4th Century)

IS THE LAW STILL FOR TODAY?

"Do not think that I have come to destroy the Torah or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod or one mark will by no means pass from the Torah till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, he will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt. 5:17-19)

WHAT IS THE LAW?

The word "Law" as it appears in the English Bible, is greatly misunderstood by modern Christendom. This word appears in the Hebrew as Torah (Strong's Heb. #8451) meaning "instruction" and in the Greek as nomos. This Greek word is actually a loan word from the Semitic languages of Hebrew and Aramaic. The primary Aramaic word for Torah in both the Tenach and New Testament portions of the Aramaic Peshitta text is namosa which comes from the Semitic root nemus meaning "to civilize." In modern Hebrew in Israel today parents will tell their children nemusi! meaning "be polite!"

THE LAWLESS APOSTASY

Let's face it, THE WORLD IS RELETIVELY UNIMPRESSED BY MODERN CHRISTENDOM. It is hardly a "light unto the nations" (Is. 42:6; 49:6; 51:4; 60:1-3; Mt. 5:14-16).

This is because one of the false teachings running rampant through much of Christendom is: "The Law is not for today". This apostate teaching relieves man of any obligation to Elohim beyond confessing a faith in the Messiah. This very destructive teaching is killing our society! The Scriptures forewarned that the teachers of the apostasy would teach people what they want to hear (2Tim. 4:3-5) and most people don't want any obligations. Yahushua warns us that these false teachers would propagate lawlessness" (Mt. 24:11-13), the word which appears in the Greek New

Testament for "lawlessness" is "anomos" (Strong's Greek # 459) which joins the Greek prefix "a" (there is not; without) with the Greek word "nomos" (Law) the resulting word means literally "there is no Law" or "[we are] without the Law" one of the primary teachings of modern Christendom! Armilius (the Anti-Messiah) will uphold this very same doctrine (2Thes. 2:3, 7-9).

Two entire books of the New Scriptures, 2 Peter and Jude, are dedicated to combating this apostate teaching. These books warn us of men who will promise "liberty" but turn from the "holy commandment" (the Law) (2Pt. 2:18-21) turning "the grace of our Elohim" into a license to sin (Jude 1:4, 14-18). Yahushua condemns these teachers saying that they would be called "least in the Kingdom of Heaven." (Mt.5:19).

LAWLESS CHRISTENDOM

Christendom has fallen deep into this apostate teaching, in fact two of Christendom's largest theological sub-sets, Dispensationalism and Replacement Theology, submit detailed theories to explain why they teach that the Law is not for today.

Dispensationalism is a form of Pre-Millennialism which replaces the eternal "covenants" with finite "ages". Two of these finite ages are "The Age of Law" which basically encompasses "Old Testament times", and "The Age of Grace" which basically encompasses "New Testament times". According to these Dispensationalists, during "Old Testament times" men were under Law, but during "New Testament times" men are under grace. Some Dispensationalists, called "Ultra-Dispensationalists", even teach that men were saved by Law in "Old Testament times," but are saved by grace in "New Testament times." As a result, Dispensationalists teach that "the Law is not for today" or "we have no Law."

Replacement Theologians teach that Elohim has replaced Israel with the Church; Judaism with Christendom; The Old Testament with The New Testament; and Law with grace. As a result, they too teach that "the Law is not for today" or "we have no Law."

Now you may be saying to yourself: "Ok, so Christendom teaches lawlessness, Don't the lawless teachers of 2 Peter & Jude go so far as to teach sexual immorality? Surely the lawless teachers of Christendom would never use their "the Law is not for today" teaching to promote sexual immorality." Wrong! Some of Christendom's teachers have already carried the "the Law is not for today" reasoning to its fullest and logical conclusion. A sect of Christendom known as "The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches" has published a tract which does just that. The nameless author of the tract writes:

Another Scripture verse that is used to show that the Scriptures condemn the gay lifestyle is found in the Old Testament Book of Leviticus, 18:22, "Thou shalt not lie with a man as thou would with a woman." Anyone who is concerned about this prohibition should read the whole chapter or the whole Book of Leviticus: No pork, no lobster, no shrimp, no oysters, no intercourse during the menstrual period, no rare meats, no eating blood, no inter-breeding of cattle, and a whole host of other laws, including the law to kill all divorced people who remarry. As Nazarenes, our law is from Messiah. Sha'ul clearly taught that Christians are no longer under the Old Law (for example in Galatians 3:23-24); that the Old Law is brought to an end in Messiah (Romans 10:4); and its fulfillment is in love (Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:14). The New Law of Messiah is the Law of Love. Neither Yahushua, nor Sha'ul, nor any of the New Testament Scriptures implies that Nazarenes are held to the cultic or ethical laws of the Mosaic Law. (Homosexuality; What the Bible Does and Does not Say; Universal Fellowship press, 1984, p. 3)

Thus Christendom's teaching that "the Law is not for today" is already being used to "turn the grace of our Elohim into perversion." (Jude 1:4; see also 2Pt. 2:18-21)

ETERNAL CONSISTENCY

Despite all of Christendom's elaborate attempts to explain why Elohim is supposedly not doing things like he used to, the Scriptures tell us that Elohim is eternally consistent (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). Men of the "Old Testament" times were just as under grace as we are today (Gen. 6:8; Ex.33:12, 17; Judges 6:17f; Jer. 31:2) and equally justified by faith (Gen.15:6; Rom. 4:1-4; Gal. 3:6; Heb. 10:38-11:40; Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11) they could not have earned their salvation (Gal. 2:16). The truth is that the "New Testament" contains more commandments than the "Old Testament". The New Testament contains 1050 commandments [as delineated in Dake's Annotated Reference Bible; By Finnis Jennings Dake; N.T. pp.313-316] while the "Old Testament" Mosaic Law contains only 613 (b.Makkot 23b).

SHA'UL'S TEACHINGS TWISTED

Sha'ul is greatly misunderstood as having taught that the Law is not for today. I have met a great many who feel uncomfortable with his writings. Some of these have even, like the Ebionites of ancient times, removed Sha'ul's from their canon (Eusebius; Eccl. Hist. 3:27:4). This belief that Yeshua may not have abolished the Law, but that Sha'ul did, has been propagated since ancient times. The "Toldot Yeshu" for example, an ancient hostile Rabbinic parody on the Gospels and Acts, accuses Sha'ul of contradicting Yahshua on this very issue (Toldot Yeshu 6:16-41; 7:3-5). At least one modern Dispensationalist, Maurice Johnson, taught that the Messiah did not abolish the Law, but that Sha'ul did several years after the fact.

He writes:

Apparently Elohim allowed this system of Jewish ordinances to be practiced about thirty years after Messiah fulfilled it because in His patience, Elohim only gradually showed the Jews how it was that His program was changing.... Thus it was that after Elohim had slowly led the Christians out of Jewish religion He had Sha'ul finally writes these glorious, liberating truths. (Saved by "Dry" Baptism!; a pamphlet by Maurice Johnson; pp. 9-10)

Kefa warns us in the Scriptures that Sha'ul's writings are difficult to understand. He warns us saying "...in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." (2 Pt. 3:15-16) Sha'ul knew that his teachings were being twisted, he mentions this in Romans, saying "And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"?-- as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say." (Rom. 3:8) Sha'ul elaborates on this slanderous twist of his teachings, saying "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!..." (Rom. 6:1-2) and "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the Law but under grace? Certainly not!" (Rom. 6:15). So then, Sha'ul was misunderstood as teaching because we are under grace, we need not observe the Law.

Upon his visit to Jerusalem in Acts 21 Sha'ul was confronted with this slanderous twist of his teachings. He was told "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe, and they are all zealous for the Law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moshe, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs." (Acts 21:20-21) In order to prove that this was nothing more than slander, Sha'ul takes the Nazarite vow and goes to make offerings (sacrifices) at the Temple (Acts 21:22-26 &

Num. 6:13-21) demonstrating that he himself kept the Law (Acts 21:24). Sha'ul did and said many things to prove that he both kept and taught the Law. He:

circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:1-3)

took the Nazarite vow (Acts 18:18; 21:17-26)

taught and observed YHWH's holy days such as:

Pesach (Acts 20:6; 1Cor. 5:6-8; 11:17-34)

Shavuot (Pentecost) (Acts 20:16; 1Cor. 16:8)

and fasting on Yom Kippur (Acts 27:9)

and even performed animal sacrifices in the Temple (Acts 21:17-26/Num. 6:13-21; Acts 24:17-18)

Among his more notable statements on the subject are:

"Neither against the Jewish Law, nor against the Temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all." (Acts 25:8)

"I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers." (Acts 28:17)

"...the Law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good." (Rom. 7:12)

"Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we maintain the Law." (Rom. 3:31).

WAS SHA'UL A HYPOCRITE?

Being confronted with the various acts and statements of Sha'ul which support the Law, many of the "Law is not for today" teachers accuse Sha'ul of being hypocritical. Charles Ryrie, for example, footnotes Acts 21:24 in his Ryrie Study Bible calling Sha'ul a "middle of the road Christian" for performing such acts. Another writer, M.A. DeHaan wrote an entire book entitled "Five Blunders of Paul" which characterizes these acts as "blunders." "These teachers of lawlessness" credit Sha'ul as the champion of their doctrine, and then condemn him for not teaching their doctrine. If Sha'ul was really a hypocrite, could he honestly have condemned hypocrisy so fervently (see Gal. 2:11-15). Consider some of his own words:

For do I now persuade men, or Elohim? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of the Messiah. (Gal. 1:10)

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated in Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our Elohim to speak to you the Good News of Elohim in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. But as we have been approved by Elohim to be entrusted with the Good News, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but Elohim who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness-- Elohim is witness. (1Thes. 2:1-5)

If Sha'ul was a hypocrite, he must have been one of the slickest con-men in history!

"WORKS OF THE LAW" AND "UNDER THE LAW"

Much of the confusion about Sha'ul's teachings on the Law involves two scripture phrases which appear in the New Testament only in Sha'ul's writings (in Rom. Gal. & 1Cor.). These two phrases are "works of the Law" and "under the Law", each of which appears 10 times in the Scriptures.

The first of these phrases, "works of the Law", is best understood through its usage in Gal. 2:16. Here Sha'ul writes:

"knowing that a man is not justified by WORKS OF THE LAW but by faith in Yeshua the Messiah, even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, that we might be justified by faith in Messiah and not by the WORKS OF THE LAW; for by the WORKS OF THE LAW no flesh shall be justified."

Sha'ul uses this phrase to describe a false method of justification which is diametrically opposed to "faith in the Messiah". To Sha'ul "works of the Law" is not an obsolete Old Testament system, but a heresy that has never been true.

The second of these phrases is "under the Law". This phrase may best be understood from its usage in Rom. 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not UNDER THE LAW but under grace." Sha'ul, therefore, sees "under grace" and "under the Law" as diametrically opposed, one cannot be both. The truth is that since we have always been under grace (see Gen. 6:8; Ex. 33:12, 17; Judges 6:17f; Jer. 31:2) we have never been "under the Law". This is because the Law was created for man, man was not created for the Law (see Mk. 2:27). "Under the Law" then, is not an obsolete Old Testament system, but a false teaching which was never true.

There can be no doubt that Sha'ul sees "works of the Law" and "under the Law" as categorically bad, yet Sha'ul calls the Law itself "holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12), certainly Sha'ul does not use these phrases to refer to the Law itself.

COMMONLY MISUNDERSTOOD PASSAGES

Several New Testament passages have often been misunderstood as teaching that the Law is not for today. The following are some of the most common:

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. (Col. 2:14 KJV)

This is just a matter of poor translation. When literally translated from the Aramaic of the Peshitta this passage reads:

And he has blotted out, by his commandments, the handwriting of our debts which were against us, and he took it from the midst and fastened it to his beam. (Eph. 2:15a)

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; (Eph. 2:15a KJV)

Again, this is just a matter of poor translation. When literally translated from the Aramaic of the Peshitta this passage reads:

And the enmity, by His flesh and the law, because of commandments in the commandments. He has abolished. (Romans 10:4)

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. (Rom. 10:4 KJV)

Again, poor translation is to blame. The word for "end" here is in the Greek text telos which can mean "end" in the sense of "termination" but can also mean "end" as in "aim" or "goal." The Aramaic word here is saka, which can also mean "aim" or "goal." The passage is better rendered:

For Messiah is the goal of the law for righteousness to everyone that trusts. (Heb. 8-10)

Several passages from Hebrews 8 through 10 are also misunderstood as teaching that the law is not for today. We can not deal fully with these here, they are dealt with fully in Semitic Light on Hebrews available from the address shown at the bottom of this article.

WHAT THE SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT THE LAW

So what's wrong with the Law that Elohim would want to destroy it? Despite the fact that David was saved by faith alone (Rom. 4:5-8) he loved the Law and delighted in it (Ps. 119: 97, 113, 163). Sha'ul also delighted in the Law (Rom. 7:22) and called it "holy, just and good." (Rom. 7:12). There is nothing wrong with the Law that Elohim should want to abolish or destroy it, in fact both the Tenach and the New Scriptures call the Law "perfect" (Ps. 19:7; James 1:25).

The fact is that Elohim did not abolish the Law, quite to the contrary the Law is everlasting. There is no shortage of Tenach passages which tell us that the Law is "everlasting" and "for all generations" (Ex. 27:21; 28:43; 29:28; 30:21; 31:17; Lev. 6:18, 22; 7:34, 36; 10:9, 15; 17:7; 23:14, 21, 41; 24:3; Num. 10:8; 15:15; 18:8, 11, 19, 23; 19:10; Deut. 5:29; Ps. 119:160) and is not to be changed or taken away from (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). The New Scriptures echo this teaching (Mt. 5:18; Lk. 16:17). The Law is not abolished by Messiah (Mt. 5:17) nor by faith (Rom. 3:31) but is even called in the New Scriptures "the Law of Messiah" (Gal. 6:2).

Now if the Law is good and everlasting then it stands to reason that it should be observed. Sha'ul tells us that we should not use grace as an excuse to sin (Rom. 6:1-2, 15) and that the only way to know sin is through the Law (Rom. 7:7). Yeshua tells us that if we love him we will keep his commandments (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23-25; 15:10). The fact that we are saved by faith is all the more reason that we should keep the Law, as the Scriptures tell us:

...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Yeshua the Messiah our Savior, that having been justified by his grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in Elohim should be careful to MAINTAIN GOOD WORKS. These things are good and profitable to men. (Titus 3:5-8)

And 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. But whoever keeps his word, truly the love of Elohim is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in him ought himself to walk just as he

walked. Brothers, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. (1 Jn. 2:3-7) [See also James 2:14-26]

Please do not use the old excuse: "I can't keep the Law anyway so why bother?". Yeshua was tempted in all things just as we are and he did keep the Law (Heb. 4:15). The Scriptures are very clear about the invalidity of this excuse:

For this commandment which I command you this day [The Law (See verses 9-11)], IT IS NOT TO HARD FOR YOU, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?' But the Word is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, THAT YOU MAY DO IT. (Deut. 30:11-14)

At this point you may be feeling very defensive, you may be saying to yourself. "I'm not obligated to the Law, I'm at liberty." Remember, the false teachers will promise "liberty" but turn from the "holy commandment" (2Pt. 2:1, 19). There is no conflict between the Law and liberty (Ps. 119:44-45) in fact, James calls the Law "the Law of Liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12) true liberty does not include a license to sin (Rom. 3:8; 6:1-2, 15).

You may ask, "Well if we don't keep the Law for salvation, then why do we keep the Law?" First of all, keeping the Law SHOWS our faith (Titus 3:5-8; 1Jn. 2:3-7; James 2:14-26). Secondly there are rewards for keeping the Law (Titus 3:8). The Psalms tell us that it "restores the soul" (Ps. 19:7). Yeshua promises that those who keep the Law and teach others to do so will be called first in the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 5:19). Additionally, Jews who keep the Mosaic Law are given a long list of other promises (Deut. 28).

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