



Which Law?

by: Dean and Susan Wheelock

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The Scriptures used in this article are:

- The Bible in Basic English* (BBE)
Bibleworks7 CD-Rom version.
- The Complete Jewish Bible* (CJB),
translated by David H. Stern,
Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.,
Clarksville, MD/Jerusalem, 1998.
- The New International Version* (NIV)
Bibleworks7 CD-Rom version.
- The Open Bible* (New King James Version [NKJV]),
Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, 1985.
- Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*, (TNK),
The Jewish Publication Society,
Philadelphia/New York, 1988.

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~ Forward ~

Shalom Aleichem (Peace be unto you),

Approximately seventeen years ago we began our humble effort to reconstruct a picture of Jewish life and thought in the first century so that we could better understand what our Savior *Y'shua* and the writers of the New Testament Scriptures wished to convey.

As we looked into the connection between our understandings as Believers in *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah) and those commonly found within the Jewish faith, we discovered numerous parallels. As time progressed, we found that seeing Scripture from the Jewish perspective actually enhanced our faith and confirmed our belief that *Y'shua* is indeed the promised Messiah. In addition, our studies increased our understanding of the life and times of *Y'shua* and His disciples.

Then, about five years ago a *Hebrew Roots* subscriber, who was a Sabbath keeper, wrote a letter to us saying that he no longer believed that a Gentile (such as himself) was obligated to keep the Festivals of God as laid out in Leviticus 23:

"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. ³ Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. ⁴ These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.'" (Lev. 23:1-4)

This letter launched us into a series of articles called *Gentiles and the Law*, in which we endeavored to explore all of the New Testament writings in an attempt to see if what he was claiming was really true. To date that series contains seventeen articles spread over thirteen issues and it is still not complete.

What we discovered in all of this research and writing, is that there is great confusion about which law Paul is speaking of when he seems to be saying the "law has been done away," or has been "nailed to the cross." What many (maybe most) Christians do not understand, is that during the time of *Y'shua* and Paul there were two sets of laws which observant Jews were expected to follow. (The same is still true today.) First of all there was the *Written Torah*, those commandments found in the first five books of the Bible; *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*. However, in addition, there is another law called the *Oral Torah*, or the *Oral Traditions*, which all Observant Jews were (and still are) expected to know and to keep. In our studies it became apparent this was the "yoke" of which the Apostle Peter spoke about at the Jerusalem Council when the issue of circumcision was taken up by the leaders of the first century Messianic Movement:

"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] we shall be saved in the same manner as they.'" (Acts 15:7-11)

This booklet, *Which Law?*, is one of the *Gentiles and the Law* articles (found in *Hebrew Roots* Issue 04-2). It explains about the two laws extant at that time and how the Gentiles who were coming to faith in *Y'shua* did not have to convert to Judaism and accept all of the precepts of the *Oral Torah* (including circumcision) in order to become full-fledged members of the Messianic Community.

We hope you will find this booklet helpful in understanding that the *Written Torah* which was given to *Moshe* (Moses) at Mount Sinai is still in effect today for all those who believe that *Y'shua* is the Savior of the world and the promised Messiah.

"Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."

(Rom. 7:12)

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

(John 3:16-17)

May God bless you as you seek
to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth,

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom
August, 2007

~ Which Law? ~



One of the confusing things about studying the 'Law,' as found in the Greek (New Testament) Scriptures, is trying to understand *Which Law* the writer is referencing. This presents a problem in understanding because, in the first century, there were two major sets of 'Laws' which existed within Judaism and both carried equal weight. These two bodies of 'Law' were (as we have discussed in previous articles) the *Written Torah* (the 613 commandments found in the first five books of the Bible) and the *Oral Torah* which had been handed down verbally over the centuries. This latter body of 'Law' included a number of components:

- ◆ *Oral Traditions*, which had been passed down by word of mouth from ancient times, which clarified some of the *Written Torah* commands which were open to interpretation because of their wording.
- ◆ *Case Law* that resulted from rulings on *Written Torah* commands which had, over the centuries, been decided in legitimate courts of law. **"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, ..."** (Deut. 16:18)
- ◆ *Customs* of the people that had developed over the centuries.
- ◆ *Rabbinic Interpretations* of the *Written Torah* commands.

These various components were all part of what is called the *Oral Torah*.

~ The Origins of Oral Torah ~

According to Rabbinic Judaism, the *Oral Torah* commands were given directly to *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses) by God when he was on Mount Sinai. A strong case can be made for this claim when it comes to certain specific portions of the *Oral Torah*. For example, there is no description given in the *Written Torah* concerning how the various vessels, which were used in Tabernacle Service, were to be constructed. According to Scripture, *Moshe* was shown a pattern of the Tabernacle accouterments which he, in turn, passed on to the men who were responsible for the actual manufacture of them:

"And see to it that you make them [Tabernacle vessels and furnishings] according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." (Exodus 25:40)

Today, these vessels are described in a book called the *Mishnah* (Meesh-nah'), which is the ancient *Oral Torah* in written form. Further clarifications are to be found in the *Gamara* (Gah-mah-rah'), the Rabbinic commentary on the *Mishnah*. Together, the *Mishnah* and the *Gamara* make up the definitive text of Rabbinic Judaism, the *Talmud* (Tahl-mood'). The written version of the *Oral Torah* (the *Mishnah*) was completed about 200 CE. This was done so that the information would not be lost as the Jews were dispersed further and further away from the centers of Rabbinic learning in Israel.

However, as we have already seen, the *Oral Torah* (*Mishnah*) also contains a great deal of information from other sources, specifically the 'Case Law' rulings, the 'Customs' that had developed over the centuries, and the 'Rabbinic Interpretations' which, in *Y'shua's* day were relatively new, having only begun to be added in the first century BCE.

These latter three categories of *Oral Torah* can be referenced, as a body, by the term *dogma*. *Dogma* in English is defined as:

"1. A doctrine or a corpus of doctrines relating to matters such as morality and faith, set forth in an authoritative manner by a church. 2. An authoritative principle, belief, or statement of ideas or opinion, especially one considered to be absolutely true."

The majority of *Oral Torah* fits this description of *dogma*. It constituted the 'doctrine' of first century *Pharisaic* Judaism, and it is usually in support of the *Written Torah*, although occasionally it does contradict the *Written*. Even when *Oral Torah* does not contradict *Written Torah*, it often adds rules and practices to the basic *Torah* commands.

~ A Problematic Situation ~

This twofold division of *Torah* 'law' created a problematic situation in the first century synagogues and it served to cause division rather than unity. A number of serious problems arose between the *Pharisaic* Jews and those Gentiles who were leaving paganism and beginning to attend synagogue. One such problem centered around the *Pharisaic* practice concerning the ritual purity and *kosher* food laws of the *Torah*. The problem was not with the *Written Torah* commands on these matters, but with the *Oral Torah (dogma)* 'fences' which the *Pharisees* had erected in order to keep the religious Jews from even getting close to breaking a *Written Torah* command.

For example, the *Written Torah* clearly states that the children of Israel were not to eat meat classified as 'unclean' or which had not been properly bled when it was slaughtered. (Those *Written Torah* laws are found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.) However, *Pharisaic* 'fences' were built around the *Written Torah's* straightforward commands, which also forbade Jews from eating anything 'common.' Common food included all food (meats, grains, fruits, or vegetables) which had not had the Levitical tithe paid upon it. Thus, any food sold in the regular markets was forbidden, because it was impossible to know if the proper tithes had been paid. An observant Jew was therefore not allowed to eat a meal in a Gentile home because he could not know for sure whether the food was common or not. In all probability the food was common.

Another *Oral Torah* fence (*dogma*) had been erected which forbade a Jew from keeping company with a Gentile, because if the Gentile physically touched him, the Jew might contract, what is called, *Secondary Ritual Impurity*. This status occurred when someone who was ritually unclean came into physical contact with a ritually clean person, thereby transferring the 'ritual impurity' of the first individual to the 'clean' individual. (This is a somewhat simplified example; the purity rules are actually quite complex.)

It was these types of "traditions of men" that Peter made mention of when he was commanded, by God, to go to the house of Cornelius, the Gentile centurion:

"Then he said to them, 'You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.'" (Acts 10:28)

Peter's *Messianic Jewish* brethren back in Jerusalem expressed the same concern when he returned:

"And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!'" (Acts 11:2-3)

The command (to not have physical, or even social, contact with Gentiles), to which both Peter and his brethren referred, is not found in the *Written Torah*, rather it was part of the *Oral Torah (dogma)*, or fences, which had been added.

~ The Pharisaic Faction ~

This divisive attitude continued to hold sway among certain *Pharisees* who had become a part of the *Messianic Community* of Believers. They firmly believed that all Gentiles were required to fully convert to Judaism (by submitting to the rite of circumcision) in order to receive salvation:

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom [*ethos* = *custom*] of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"
(Acts 15:1)

Implied in this demand, by the ultra-conservative *Pharisees*, was the understanding that these new *Messianic Proselytes* would also have to keep all of the *Oral Torah* (customs or *dogma*) commands as well as the *Written Torah* commands. The *Oral Torah* commands, when observed in their entirety, made Judaism an extremely 'rule bound' religion.

Oral Torah is the practical application, or manner, in which the laws found in the *Written Torah* have been interpreted by the Jewish Sages and Rabbis, and thereby applied to the everyday life of the common Jew. It is known as *Halacha* (Hah-lah-chah' = the way one walks or way of life). The *Pharisees* taught that all of it taken together (*Written Torah* plus the *Oral Torah* interpretations) constituted the "law of *Moshe*," since they claimed that both sets of 'law' had been given on Mount Sinai. This is why, a few verses later, these conservative *Pharisees* referred to this entire body of "law" (*Written* and *Oral*) as the *nomos* or law of *Moshe* and not just as the *ethos* or customs of *Moshe*, as it had been called in v. 1:

"And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them [*convert them to Judaism*], and to command them to keep the law [*nomos* = law] of Moses.'" (Acts 15:4-5)

It was not simply the rite of circumcision that was being promoted. Peter correctly understood that what the *Pharisees* were really saying was that the *Gentile Believers* should be required to become Jews and keep the "whole law," both the *Written Torah* plus its Rabbinic interpretations as found in the *Oral Torah* (*dogma*) traditions. This is why, at the Jerusalem Council, Peter said that even the Jews (who had been trained from age five in the intricacies of both the *Written* and *Oral Torah*) were unable to keep the "whole law" properly. There were just too many rules to follow which interfered with normal life. Therefore, for the common Jew, the "whole law" (*Written* and *Oral*) had become a burden they were no longer able to bear:

"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did to us*, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] we shall be saved in the same manner as they.'" (Acts 15:7-11)

Peter went on to say that no one (Jew nor Gentile) could ever receive salvation (being saved from the death penalty which results from sin) by keeping the *Pharisees'* many rules. Nor can Believers receive salvation as a result of keeping the *Written Torah* commands, because it is the *Written Torah* that condemns the *Messianic Believer*, showing us when sin has occurred and what sin has been committed. Salvation can only be obtained through the *Grace* (favor) which *Messianic Believers* receive from God the Father as a result of repentance for having sinned, and the acceptance of *Y'shua* as their Messiah and Savior who personally paid the penalty price (death) for their sins through His shed blood, thus obtaining forgiveness for them.

~ SIN ~

At this point, let us again remind ourselves about some facts concerning the Believers big bugaboo, SIN! SIN is what we do not want in our lives. It is what has placed all of mankind into a fallen, or sinful, condition. The ultimate 'reward' for being a SINNER (having committed SIN) is DEATH!

"For the wages of sin is death, ..." (Romans 6:23)

Personal SALVATION means being SAVED from the awful fate of eternal death, which we humans have brought upon ourselves because we have SINNED (having submitted to the call of our own evil inclination)!

Because SIN is the action which has interposed itself between us and eternal life, we need to know two things:

First of all, we need to know what constitutes SIN so that we can avoid it if at all possible. This is not a case of trying to "earn" one's salvation, since salvation has already been lost because SIN has already been committed. It is merely a matter of doing our best to avoid committing any more SIN -- an effort which is not totally successful while we are still in the flesh.

Second, when we do fall from *Grace* (favor) and commit SIN inadvertently, we need to understand how we can be reinstated into *Favor* (grace) once more.

The answer to the first question is quite clear no matter which Biblical translation one uses:

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law [*anomia* = without law or against law]." (1 John 3:4 KJV)

"Every one who is doing the sin, the lawlessness also he doth do, and the sin is the lawlessness, [*anomia*]..." (1 John 3:4 Young's Literal Trans.)

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness [*anomia*]." (1 John 3:4 NIV)

"Everyone who is a sinner goes against the law, for sin is going against the law [*anomia*]." (1 John 3:4 Bible in Basic English)

No matter how one slices it, SIN is the breaking of LAW (LAWLESSNESS).

Sometimes, English versions translate the Greek word *anomia* as "iniquity:"

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity [*anomia* = lawlessness = sin]."

(Matt. 7:21-23 KJV)

The real meaning of this Greek word *anomia* is: "*the condition of [being] without law.*" Anyone who wishes to declare that God's 'Law' has been "done away," so they do not feel obliged to obey it in its totality, is promulgating the abolishment of God's 'Law' and therefore living a life "without [God's] law" in its completeness.

This does not mean that such people are necessarily 'bad' by mankind's standards, for they may live very 'moral' lives. By the same token, many Hindus and Buddhists also live very 'moral' lives by mankind's standards, but they have not received salvation which can come only from the acceptance of *Y'shua's* sacrificial offering of Himself. It must be remembered that mankind's standards are never in complete agreement with God's standards, although they may agree on many points. Thus, someone who is living a 'moral' life by mankind's standards will still fall short of God's standards in certain areas:

" ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ..." (Rom. 3:23)

Y'shua, in His own words (Matt. 7:23 above), states that He will say that He never knew those who commit iniquity or acts contrary to the law and they should depart from before His face.

That is heavy!

Despite the gravity of being in a state of SIN, God, in His mercy, has created a way to be reinstated back into righteousness when SIN reoccurs. That way is called repentance:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (I John 1:8-10)

There are two ways a person can say they have not sinned. One is to say they have not broken the Law, the other is to say that the Law is no longer in effect:

" ... sin is not imputed when there is no law." (Rom. 5:13)

~ Which Law? ~

The next question that needs to be asked is, which body of LAW or what combinations of bodies of LAW, if broken, constitute Biblical SIN and therefore cause an individual to be classified as a SINNER? Today, instead of having just two sets of Law from which to choose, there are no less than five bodies of Law available to complicate matters.

- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) of the *Written Torah*?
- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) of the *Oral Torah*?
- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) that were given by *Y'shua HaMashiach*?
- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) that were given later by the Apostles (such as Peter, James, John, and Paul)?
- ◆ Is it a SIN to break the commands (LAW) of *Church Traditions*?

~ Written Torah ~

Probably the vast majority of Christians have been taught that the *Written Torah* commands (usually referred to as "Old Testament Law") have been "done away." Some go so far as to say that to even try and keep the *Written*

Torah (Old Testament) commands constitutes SIN. However, the opinions of men do not matter. What matters is the opinion of God and His Son *Y'shua* (our Betrothed Husband).

A series of articles in *Hebrew Roots (Gentiles and the Law)* is devoted to this very question, concerning whether or not the *Written Torah* is still valid as a standard for behavior in the *Messianic Community*, and if the breaking of *Written Torah* commands constitute the type of SIN that requires the application of the blood of *Y'shua* for its expiation. Those who have studied the articles in this series already know that our response to that question is in the affirmative. We believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that to violate a *Written Torah* command, that applies to us as individuals, constitutes SIN and it does require repentance and forgiveness in order for *Grace* (favor) to be restored. Following are a few New Testament Scriptures which support this view.

Y'shua was clear about the continuing validity of the *Written Torah* (see *Gentiles and the Law: Y'shua's Perspective* in Issue 03-2). He said clearly and unequivocally that He did not come to destroy the *Written Torah*:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy [kataluo = dissolve, diminish, overthrow] but to fulfill [pleroo = fulfill in the sense of completing our understanding]." (Matt. 5:17)

Y'shua said that not one portion of the *Written Torah* would be abrogated:

"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass [parerchomai = pass away or perish] from the law till all is fulfilled [ginomai = come to pass]." (Matt. 5:18)

Y'shua said that anyone who broke even the least of the *Written Torah* commandments would be considered 'least' in the Kingdom:

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least [elachistos = smallest in importance] in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

(Matt. 5:19)

Y'shua said that the righteousness (sinlessness) of the Believers had to exceed that of the *Pharisees*, if Believers were to have a place in the millennial kingdom:

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness [dikaiosune = integrity, virtue, purity of life, correctness of thinking and feeling] exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20)

Y'shua followed this statement with specific examples showing how the Believer's heart (i.e. their thinking) had to be changed so that even the thought of adultery or murder was not to be held. *Y'shua* fulfilled or completed (*pleroo*) the *Written Torah* by showing it was not just a guide to right action but also a guide to right thoughts. If the thoughts are clean, so too will the actions be right. However, it is the *Written Torah* which defines right behavior. Man is not allowed to decide what constitutes SIN and what constitutes righteousness. That would be like allowing the children of a family to set the rules of the family. Only God can decide such important matters.

Y'shua clearly stated that those who tried to abolish the *Written Torah*, and thereby both legitimize and practice lawlessness (*anomia*), were going to be cast into the furnace of fire:

"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness [anomia],⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 13:41-42)

Remember, the Apostle John clearly said that sin equals lawlessness:

"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." (1 John 3:4)

James, the half brother of *Y'shua*, said that the *Written Torah*, if followed, would actually produce true liberty:

"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:25)

The Apostle Paul said that he believed everything written in the *Torah*:

"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets."

(Acts 24:14)

Paul said that Believers actually establish the *Torah* through their faith in *Y'shua*:

"Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." (Rom. 3:31)

Paul said the *Written Torah* was:

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

Paul said that he was still carnal flesh but that the *Written Torah* was a spiritual set of laws and they were good laws:

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ... ¹⁶ ... I agree with the law that it is good." (Rom. 7:14, 16)

Paul said that Believers should not have fellowship or communion with those who are lawless:

**"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness [*anomia*]? And what communion has light with darkness?"
(II Cor. 6:14)**

The writer of the book of *Hebrews* expounds on the Scriptures which speak of *Y'shua*, stating that He hated *anomia* (lawlessness) and because *Y'shua* hated *anomia* He was given preference above all other men:

"You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness [*anomia*];

Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You

With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." (Heb. 1:9 from Psalm 45)

Based upon the testimony of *Y'shua*, John, James, Paul, and the writer of the book of *Hebrews*, we can only conclude that violating those *Written Torah* commands which apply specifically to us, constitutes SIN in the eyes of God. But do not despair, as was already mentioned, there is a solution to the problem of SIN. If we Confess our sins in full Repentance (turning away from them) and Accept the blood of *Y'shua* in full payment for those SINS, then Forgiveness will be granted and Restoration to a state of Grace (favor) with God will be accomplished.

~ Oral Torah ~

Most Believers would agree, in principle, that failing to follow the *Oral Torah* (*dogma*) commands that were added by the Jewish Sages does not constitute Biblical SIN, especially in light of one particular statement which *Y'shua* made to the *Pharisees*, which He said was indicative of a pervasive attitude:

"Now when they [*the Pharisees*] saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. ³ For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

⁵ Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?'

⁶ He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

**"This people honors Me with *their* lips,
But their heart is far from Me.**

**⁷ And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men."**

⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men -- the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.'

"⁹ He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother;" and, "He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death." ¹¹ But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me *is* Corban'" -- (that is, a gift to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do." (Mark 7:2-13)

Nevertheless, Paul said clearly that if a Believer thought something was wrong to do (even if the *Written Torah* permitted it), it was a SIN if that person went ahead and committed such an act:

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*" (Rom. 14:23)

Thus, for the people referred to by Paul in Romans 14, it would be a SIN for them to eat the 'common' meat (this passage does not refer to unclean meat -- see the article *Pursue Peace* in Issue 03-4/04-1), because they believed it was a SIN based on their understanding and acceptance of the *Oral Torah* commands.

However, it is our understanding that Believers are not under the *Halacha* of the *Oral Torah*. Based upon the example and teaching of our Rabbi (Teacher) *Y'shua*, it is not a sin if one does not keep the *Oral Torah* (*dogma*) traditions unless one believes that to not do so is SIN.

~ Y'shua's Commands ~

Many Believers might say that both the *Written Torah* and the *Oral Torah* have been "done away" and can no longer be used as the standard by which SIN is defined. Instead, they say, SIN is the transgression of *Y'shua's* commands. But is there really any difference between the commands of *Y'shua* and the commands of the *Written Torah* when one takes into consideration the following statement?

"I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)

Perhaps the most often quoted of *Y'shua's* commands is:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34)

Some claim that Believers no longer need to obey the *Written Torah's* rules, and that as long as we just "love" one another everything will be in accordance with God's will. Of course, that is true if we really do "love" one another with the same level of *agape* love that *Y'shua* showed towards us. Remember though, that *Y'shua's* love (*agape*) was so great, He was willing to die for us while we were still enmeshed in our SINS:

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ [Messiah] died for us." (Rom. 5:8)

The clear implication here is that once we have accepted *Y'shua's* sacrifice as payment for our past sins, we should refrain from sin, as much as we are able. Such behavior does not constitute trying to "earn" one's salvation, it is merely being circumspect in one's life. Paul confirms that understanding a few verses later:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2)

If we willingly continue in sin, we crucify *Y'shua* all over again:

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they fall away [*parapipto* = to deviate from the right path], to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:4-6)

* What Is Love? *

The Apostle John defined "love" for the *Messianic Community*:

"This is love [*agape*], that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it."

(II John 1:6)

Love is walking in 'His' commandments. Does the word 'His' refer to the Father or to *Y'shua*? It is our opinion that all members of the *Messianic Community* ought to walk in the commandments that *Y'shua* gave to them. We also teach that all members of the *Messianic Community* should walk in the commandments of the *Written Torah*. The question is: are these two different sets of Law or are they one and the same?

Many people call the 'Old Testament' commandments the "commandments of the Father," as opposed to the 'New Testament' commandments which they call the "commandments of the Son." Interestingly enough, this type of teaching often comes from the same people who believe that *Y'shua* is God Incarnate, in other words that *Y'shua* preexisted His human birth and was with the Father from the beginning. This theology is supported by a number of Scriptures including the following:

"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." (Col. 1:16-18)

Since verse 18 states that the One being spoken of here is "**the firstborn from the dead,**" it is clear that Paul is speaking of *Y'shua* and not of the Father. If *Y'shua* is the One through whom "**all things were created,**" then it stands to reason that *Y'shua* is the One who is also the Creator of the *Written Torah*. Some may argue this point, but whether a person believes that *Y'shua* is God Incarnate or not, in either case the commandments found in the *Written Torah* are in strict accordance with the Father's wishes. Either the Father created them Himself, or *Y'shua* created them in accordance with the Father's wishes, for the Father is ultimately the One in charge:

"Then comes the end, when He [*Y'shua*] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He [*Y'shua*] must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For 'He [*God the Father*] has put all things under His [*Y'shua's*] feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He [*God the Father*] who put all things under Him [*Y'shua*] is excepted. ²⁸ Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him [*God the Father*] who put all things under Him [*Y'shua*], that God may be all in all." (I Cor. 15:24-28)

* Oneness *

The idea that the 'Old Testament' laws (*Written Torah*) are the laws of the Father and that they were not adequate to do the job of saving people, is an ancient one and is really a part of the *Gnostic* teachings from the first century CE. Some *Gnostics* went so far as to teach that the 'God' of the 'Old Testament' was an evil god and that *Y'shua* was the 'good god' who did away with all of the 'Old Testament' laws (see *The Religious Situation* in Issue 03-4/04-1). While modern teachers usually do not go so far as to teach anything this absurd, there is still an element of this teaching in the idea that the *Written Torah* is now useless and is "done away" through the cross. In either case, the *Written Torah* is considered inferior. People only think this because they do not understand that the purpose of the *Written Torah* was not to save people from their SINS but to show them how they were SINNING.

Y'shua stated clearly that there was no division between Him and the Father. Instead, He said:

"I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)

In all probability, when *Y'shua* spoke those words He was using the Hebrew language. In that case He would have said: **"I and my Father are *echad* (*eh-chahd*)."**

The Hebrew word *echad* does mean a singular one and the first four times it is used in the book of *Genesis* it means precisely that (Gen. 1:5, 9; 2:11, 21). However, the fifth time it is used it refers to two people being united as "one flesh:"

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one [*echad*] flesh." (Gen. 2:24)

While *Adam* (Ah-dahm') and *Chava* (Hah-vah' = Eve) were only able to become "one" in terms of the flesh, *Y'shua* and the Father are "one" in spirit, just as we are to be "one" in spirit with *Y'shua*. He prayed about this 'oneness mystery' at the Last Supper:

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (John 17:20-23)

It was that same evening when *Y'shua* made another revealing statement about the commandments that He had given to His disciples:

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:9-12)

In this passage *Y'shua* equates keeping the commandments (whether of the Father or of the Son) as being an act of *agape* love. Is it possible that these two sets of commandments can be in conflict with each other? Reason tells us that cannot be so. Love and commandment keeping are intimately tied up together. As Believers we keep the commandments because we love both the Father and the Son and want to do everything we can to please them. Commandment keeping is an act of love, not an act of fear or merely a method by which to earn something:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

"I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)

If these statements (of *Y'shua*) are true, then there can be no difference whatsoever between the commandments of the Father and those of the Son. If the *Written Torah* was a bad set of laws that the Son had to come and "do away with," then the Father and the Son are not *echad* (one).

Finally, *Y'shua* stated clearly that only those people who were doing the will of the Father will have a place in the Kingdom:

"Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matt. 7:21)

The bottom line, in our opinion, is that both the *Written Torah* and the enhancement of those commandments through the teachings (commandments) of *Y'shua* are to be observed. To not observe them constitutes Biblical SIN, which, when committed, requires repentance and forgiveness in order for a state of *Grace* (favor) to be returned.

~ The Apostle's Commands ~

There is also a body of commands that were given by the Apostles and that are found recorded in the Greek Scriptures (New Testament). Are these commands to be kept today by *Messianic Believers*?

According to Finis Jennings Dake, in his *Annotated Reference Bible*, there are 1050 commands found in the New Testament. This includes both the commands of *Y'shua* and the commands (as he interprets them) of the Apostles. For example:

"But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless." (Titus 3:9)

According to Dake, in this one verse are found three commands: to avoid "foolish questions" (disputes and contentions), to avoid "genealogies," and to avoid "strivings about the law." Notice it does not say to avoid the law, but to avoid 'strivings' about the law. In other words, to avoid arguing about how a law is to be observed, not whether or not it is to be observed.

Does this passage also mean that it is absolutely forbidden for a Believer to trace their genealogy? Some people may take it exactly that way. However, another passage of Scripture sheds a little more light on the subject:

"... nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith." (I Tim. 1:4)

There certainly are a lot of genealogies found in the Scripture, so it does not make sense to say that it is absolutely forbidden for a person to do some genealogical research. What the sense of these passages tell us is that it is not profitable for a member of the *Messianic Community* to investigate their genealogy in order to brag about it to others, thereby trying to place themselves above other people simply because they were born to a certain family line. The important thing is what each individual does with their life, not who their mother and father might have been.

Another example from F.J. Dake is this:

"... be thankful." (Col. 3:15)

This command is confirmed in another passage:

"... giving thanks always for all things ..." (Eph. 5:20)

Does this mean we are to be thankful when a loved one dies, or when a loved one experiences a terrible accident? If we are to rightly divide the Word of Truth, we need to be careful to understand what the Scriptures are really teaching. It is true that even in the midst of great adversity there is great blessing because we know that in the end God will bring us into eternal life in His Kingdom. For that we can always be thankful. But the common sense of these passages is not that we should be thankful when some great calamity befalls us or someone close to us, or even (especially?) if it happens to our enemy:

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? ⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:44-48)

The commands of the Apostles give us great insight into how we, as Believers, should live our lives. However, they are not always the kind of direct commands that are to be found in the *Written Torah*. In at least one instance the Apostle Paul seems to be giving direct commands and then ends the discourse by stating that what he was relaying was really a 'custom.' The subject was about men's and women's hair:

"But if anyone seems to be contentious [*about hair lengths*], we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God." (I Cor. 11:16)

The advice and admonitions given by the Apostles in the Greek Scriptures are extremely valuable tools for Believers to use as they learn the *Halacha* (the way one walks) of the *Messianic Community*. However, to say that everything they taught is strictly applicable to today is a mistake. For example, Paul suggested that it would be better if Believers did not marry:

"I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress -- that *it is good for a man to remain as he is*: ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife." (I Cor. 7:26-27)

If unmarried Believers never married, the early *Messianic Community* would have ended up like the American religious community known as the Shakers. They would have, in time, come to the end of the line because they did not procreate according to the commandment of the *Written Torah*:

"Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Gen. 1:28)

However, to give Paul proper credit it is necessary to add that he said himself that what he had just written was not a command but a suggestion that took into consideration the trials of the time:

"A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment -- and I think I also have the Spirit of God." (I Cor. 7:39-40)

The teachings of the Apostles are extremely important to understand. However, it is also important for the Believer to fully understand whether they are reading a command, a custom, or a judgment, before applying it to their own life. If it is a custom or a judgment, one must ask if it applies to their life situation.

For this reason, we cannot say unequivocally that all the so-called 'commands' of the Apostles are applicable to us in every situation today. Pray for wisdom, so that you might know the will of God in your life and how to apply these understandings.

~ Church Tradition ~

While most Believers would probably say that the *Oral Torah* commands are no longer applicable today, many of those same people would say that the extra-Biblical teachings of their own church denomination are binding upon the Believer and to break such tradition could well be classified as SIN.

At this point it would be well if we reviewed the definition of *dogma*:

"1. A doctrine or a corpus of doctrines relating to matters such as morality and faith, set forth in an authoritative manner by a church. 2. An authoritative principle, belief, or statement of ideas or opinion, especially one considered to be absolutely true."

Many *Church Traditions (dogma)*, like the *Oral Torah*, are supportive of the precepts found in the *Written Torah*. However, in those places where *Church Tradition (dogma)* deviates from the *Written Torah* commands, they must, in our opinion, be ignored.

In some cases, *Church Tradition (dogma)* may be more strict than the *Written Torah* but not in direct violation of it. For example, some Christians would argue that it is a SIN to drink fermented wine because their particular denomination prohibits the consumption of alcohol, even though *Written Torah* makes no such prohibition. On the other hand, neither does Scripture state that a Believer must consume alcohol. It is a personal choice. There is no doubt that some people should abstain from alcohol because they are addicted to it. In any event, Scripture clearly teaches against drunkenness:

**"Wine is a mocker,
Strong drink is a brawler,
And whoever is led astray by it is not wise." (Prov. 20:1)**

Some of these same anti-alcohol Christians might argue that keeping an *Oral Torah (dogma)* command that did not violate the *Written Torah* would constitute trying to "earn one's salvation."

In other words, some teach that it is proper (maybe even necessary) for a member of their church to observe their particular denominational traditions while, at the same time, they teach that observing an *Oral Torah* command is forbidden. Many pastors might go so far as to say that to disobey a *Church Tradition* would constitute SIN and many members would, no doubt, feel like they had SINNED if they disobeyed such a strongly held *Church Tradition*. Now, if a church member truly believes that to commit a certain act (such as the consumption of alcohol) constitutes SIN, even though it is not forbidden by the *Written Torah*, then it is SIN for that individual because, as we have already seen, his own conscience condemns him:

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23)

The rules need to be applied fairly across the board. If it is acceptable for a Christian to keep his denomination's *Church Traditions*, because they believe that to not do so would be a SIN, then it should also be acceptable for a Messianic Jew to keep the 'laws' found in the *Oral Torah*, provided that he too sincerely believes that to break them would constitute SIN. If the rules are applied fairly across the board, then no Believer will condemn a brother concerning the keeping or not keeping of *Oral Traditions*, as long as those traditions do not contradict the *Written Torah*.

To say that Believers need not (some would say "must not") keep the *Oral Torah* commands of the Jewish Sages, and then turn right around and say that one must keep their particular denomination's oral commands is hypocrisy:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness [*anomia*]." (Matt. 23:27-28)

There are other teachers who tell their congregations that tithing to their church is commanded by God and that a Believer who refuses to tithe is "stealing from God." Yet some of these very same teachers may also preach that the "law has been done away." Such contradictory teaching is hypocrisy.

Just for the record, the Jewish teaching on tithing is that it only applies to agriculture products grown in the land of Israel and only when there is a functioning Temple with a functioning Levitical Priesthood. They teach giving, not tithing, as a way to support their synagogues and charities and most Jews are very generous in this regard.

It is our understanding that Believers are not under the *Halacha* of the *Church Traditions* and it is not a sin if one does not keep the *Church Traditions (dogma)* unless one believes that to not do so is SIN.

~ Summary ~

In the first century there were two bodies of Law which, some believed, were both valid. However, *Y'shua* and the leaders of the *Messianic Community* (James, Peter, John, and Paul) did not agree. They taught that only the *Written Torah* was to be used to define SIN, unless one's conscience would not allow them to ignore an *Oral Torah* command (*dogma*).

The teachings of *Y'shua*, and later on those of the Apostles, gave clarification to the *Written Torah* commands. In some cases, they made the commands of the *Written Torah* more stringent, because they required a heart response in addition to the keeping of the actual physical command.

Just like the *Messianic Community* of the first century, today's Believer is faced with certain choices when trying to determine which Laws, if broken, fall under the Scriptural definition of SIN. However, today there are at least five bodies of 'Law' which vie for the Believer's attention. In addition to the *Written Torah*, we must consider the ancient *Oral Torah* of Jewish *Halacha*, the teachings of *Y'shua*, the teachings of the Apostles, and the development of denominational *Church Traditions*.

It is our studied opinion that only the *Written Torah* and the teachings of *Y'shua* are definitive when it comes to understanding what is SIN. The teachings of the Apostles, while extremely useful to the *Messianic Believer*, must be viewed carefully to see if they are actual commands or interpretations (i.e. *Oral Torah*) of the *Written* commands. Taken together, the *Written Torah*, *Y'shua's* teachings, and the teachings of the Apostles form a *Halacha* (the way one walks) for the *Messianic Believer*.

While the ancient *Oral Torah* of Rabbinic Judaism and the *Church Traditions* of Christianity can be helpful because they give us information about how others have interpreted the Scriptures, neither are binding upon *Messianic Believers* today unless one's conscience demands such adherence.

The bottom line is that we should follow the pathway of good works that was established by *Y'shua*:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*] for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

The pathway that *Y'shua* demonstrated in His life here on earth was obedience to the *Written Torah*:

" ... 'I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.'" (John 15:10)

Which Law is still in effect today?

It is none other than God's Law, the *Written Torah*!

Shalom!

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