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**Does the New Testament
Really Do Away With the Law?**

TORAH VALIDATES



THE NEW TESTAMENT

invitation of Corinthian Believers being asked to the home of a non-Believer (1 Corinthians 10:28)—an invitation which *could* have been turned down by many of them. *Nowhere* in 1 Corinthians 10 does Paul uphold the slogan “All things are permitted,” because he *certainly* does not allow—once it is discovered—for the Corinthians to eat meat sacrificed to *idols*. Unfortunately in much of contemporary Christianity, the maxim of “All things are permitted” now includes much, much more than what one might be served at a non-Believer’s dinner table.²⁰⁹

2 Corinthians 3:14

Pastor: 2 Corinthians 3:14: The veil of the old covenant has been removed.

“But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah.”

The pastor asserts that “The veil of the old covenant has been removed,” and does so with the intention to claim that the Torah or Law of Moses, and its commandments, have been abolished and are no longer necessary to follow. These words, of course, are delivered by Paul within a much larger scope of argument within 2 Corinthians ch. 3 that cannot be overlooked. Furthermore, it would be most pointless to argue that the New Covenant, which has presumably been enacted within the lives of redeemed persons in the Messiah—is something completely divorced from the Torah. The expressed intention of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27) is that the Lord will “put [His] laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts” (Hebrews 8:10, RSV), speaking of inscribing His Instruction onto the hearts of saved men and women **by the power of the Holy Spirit** so that they might *keep and obey* it. This in no way describes an abolition of the Law of Moses, but a re-emphasis of its importance for those who intend to be holy.

The Apostle Paul attests that his Corinthian audience is among those who have benefited from the promise of the New Covenant, specifically telling them, “you are a letter of Messiah, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Messiah toward God...who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:4-5, 6). Commentators largely recognize the Tanach promise of God writing His Torah onto the hearts of His people, as being a factor in Paul’s thought here.²¹⁰ In the words of Paul Barnett, “The new covenant, as prophesied by Jeremiah, will replace the outward imposition of the Law on a people of rebellious heart. Rather...the Law of God will be in the hearts and minds of a forgiven people, who from least to greatest, will ‘know the LORD’ (Jer 31:33-34).”²¹¹

A major thrust, in acknowledging that the era of New Covenant has arrived, is that Yeshua the Messiah in His own sacrifice has paid the ultimate penalty for human sin (Luke 22:20). The New Covenant power in cleansing people from their sins and in enabling the redeemed to live

²⁰⁹ For a further evaluation, consult the author’s article “The Message of 1 Corinthians.”

Also consider reading the author’s articles “To Eat or Not to Eat?” and “How Are We to Properly Keep Kosher?” 1 Corinthians 10 and other related issues will be examined in greater detail in the forthcoming *Messianic Kosher Helper* by TNN Press.

²¹⁰ Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 190; Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, Vol 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 52; Colin Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 91.

²¹¹ Paul Barnett, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp 176-177.

in obedience to the Lord is clearly to be one of the Spirit writing the commandments on the heart, and not just instructions inscribed onto cold stone. Contrasting this, as Barnett notes, "The letter' comes to a people whose hearts are 'stone,' that is, dead, unable to 'follow' God's 'decrees' or 'keep' his 'laws.'"²¹² These are unregenerate people for whom God's Torah can only function as a ministry of condemnation. Yet, Paul is clear that if such a ministry of condemnation—a condition where there is no final resolution for human sin that has been appropriated—came with glory, **then** the ministry of righteousness in Messiah Yeshua has arrived with even more glory:

"But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it" (2 Corinthians 3:7-10).

Given the fact that the Tanach's own New Covenant promise is that the Torah is to be written onto the hearts of God's people, we cannot see any disparagement of the Torah's instruction or commandments or even Moses here—but rather a comparison and contrast between a previous function *and* an intended current function. *Hē diakonia tou thanatou* (ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου) or "the ministry of death," or *tē diakonia tēs katakriseōs* (τῇ διακονίᾳ τῆς κατακρίσεως), "the ministry of condemnation"—came in glory because its Originator is the Creator God. The Torah or Law condemns all of those who violate its statutes, those who lack the internal ability to truly obey. But if the Torah's stipulations of penalties and condemnation came with God's glory, then *hē diakonia tou pneumatos* (ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος) or "the ministry of the Spirit," or *hē diakonia tēs dikaioσύνης* (ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης) or "the ministry of righteousness"—"must far exceed it in splendor" (2 Corinthians 3:9, RSV). This second function of the Torah is that which is able to be lived forth in the lives of those, who clearly acknowledge Yeshua as Savior, are filled with the Holy Spirit, and who walk according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4).

As the Apostle Paul must unfortunately observe, while people like the Corinthians have experienced much of this reality, many of Paul's own Jewish brethren have not. He makes light of the fact that Moses had to once wear a veil because of the glory of God radiating off of him (Exodus 34:34). In a similar way, when many of his fellow Jews hear the Torah read, a kind of veil exists over their hearts—preventing them from being able to see the Lord Messiah to which it points:

"Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech, and *are* not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. **But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah.** But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:12-16).

The function of the veil, over Moses' face, can be rightly compared to the heavy curtain which separated out the Holy of Holies in the ancient Tabernacle and Temple, a curtain which was torn in two at the crucifixion of Yeshua (Mark 15:38; Matthew 27:51; Luke 23:45). Such a barrier can prevent people from seeing to *telos tou katargoumenou* (τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταργουμένου), "the goal of what was being abolished" (my translation). This goal, of course, is the Messiah

²¹² Ibid., 177.

Himself, who came to offer Himself as the final atonement for human violation of the Law, the condemnation of the Torah having been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

Unfortunately, the condition of a veiled heart and mind present within a person comes from obstinance, stubbornness, and disobedience—which the Tanach most sadly attests to existing among God's people (Deuteronomy 29:2-4; Isaiah 6:9-10; 63:17; Jeremiah 31:32). Paul has to unfortunately conclude for most of his fellow Jews, **"until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah"** (2 Corinthians 3:14). The veil obviously represents the barrier that exists between unredeemed humanity and God, which as Barnett astutely concludes "'in Christ'...is 'abolished,' allowing the glory of God to shine brightly and forever 'in the face of Christ' (4:6)."²¹³

The challenge, for many Bible readers, is in thinking that the "old covenant" (*tēs palaias diathēkēs*, τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης) is just akin to the Tanach Scriptures—when what is to occur is a transference in people's lives from the sphere of the ministry of death/condemnation to the ministry of the Spirit/righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:8-9). The Tanach Scriptures have not been nullified as a source of teaching and instruction for those in the Messiah (cf. 2 Timothy 3:15-16).

Colin Kruse makes the ever-important point, "It is important to recognize that Paul does not imply that the law itself was fading away. The law as the expression of the will of God for human conduct is still valid. In fact, Paul says the purpose of God in bringing in the new covenant of the Spirit was precisely that the righteous demands of the law might be fulfilled in those who walk by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4)."²¹⁴ What we actually see in terms of the comparison and contrast of the Old Covenant and New Covenant are **two different functions** of Moses' Teaching, which either manifest in the lives of the unredeemed **or** in the lives of the redeemed:

- **The Old Covenant:** The ministry of death/condemnation is how the Torah functions for those who are not in the Messiah, who have a veil lying over their hearts, and who fail to have God's Spirit transcribe His Instruction on their hearts.
- **The New Covenant:** The ministry of the Spirit/righteousness is how the Torah functions for those who are in the Messiah, who have the veil over their hearts removed, and who live according to the freedom from condemnation they have in Him.

If the Old Covenant has been correctly identified as a *function* of the Torah, to be contrasted against the New Covenant where the Torah is supernaturally transcribed on the hearts of the redeemed—then how are we to take Paul's assessment that the Old Covenant is somehow "read" (2 Corinthians 3:14)? Perhaps we should consider the dilemma of the Romans 7 sinner, the one who when he hears the Torah's commandments like the Tenth Commandment, can only sin even more, suffer a condition of spiritual death, and exist in a state of condemnation before the Lord (Romans 7:7-24). The answer to the sinner's dilemma is being released from condemnation and exile from God, via the salvation provided in Yeshua—which is to then enable obedience to the Law (Romans 7:25-8:4). Commenting on the ministry of death/condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7-8), Barnett concurs that "The complex 'wretched man' passage (Rom 7:7-25) may be, in part, Paul's personalization of the devastating impact of the Law of God on a person sinful of heart."²¹⁵ God's Torah is, of course, not the problem (Romans 7:12)—**sin, rebellion, and obstinance in an unregenerated person are** (Romans 7:13)!

²¹³ Barnett, 195.

²¹⁴ Kruse, 96.

²¹⁵ Barnett, 182.

Much of the Torah's Instruction undeniably regards what will happen to people who break the Law. For many people who read the Torah, and realize that they stand as condemned sinners before a holy and righteous God—this causes them to turn toward Him, *utterly broken because of their human failures*, and claim the covering of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) so that they can be reconciled and redeemed. Those who hear the Old Covenant ministry of death/condemnation read and are convicted of their sin *should* turn to the Lord, and as a result of receiving salvation will have the New Covenant ministry of the Spirit/righteousness enacted within them. The veil, that is to be removed, is the barrier that exists between an unredeemed sinner and a Perfect God. Unfortunately for many people, be it Paul's First Century Jewish brethren, or various persons identifying as "Christians" today—they can be so stubborn and obstinate, that they remain unconvinced that they need Yeshua the Messiah in their lives, so that the Old Covenant ministry of death/condemnation can be nullified.

Those who have experienced the transformative power of the good news, with the presence of God in their hearts, are those who can truly understand the profundity of what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:17: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty." This is a "freedom" (RSV/NIV) from condemnation; it is not some kind of permissiveness allowing for a dismissal of God's Torah as Instruction to be heeded and followed. Barnett similarly states,

"It is 'freedom' from the 'condemnation' arising from inability through 'the flesh' to keep the Law of God (cf. Rom 7:7-12). Furthermore, it is a Spirit-empowered freedom, arising from the 'righteousness' of those dedicated to God 'in Christ' (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 3:8; 5:21) to fulfill the 'righteous' requirement of the Law (Rom 8:4). The new covenant as promised by the prophets was not a covenant of lawlessness, but a covenant under which people would be moved by the Spirit to 'follow [God's] decrees and be careful to keep [his] laws' (Ezek 36:27), to have '[his] law in their minds...[written] in their hearts' (Jer 31:33)..."²¹⁶

Barnett is also keen to note the existence of "the ethical passages that are so extensive in Paul's writings and that, generally speaking, express the Law as radically crystallized—and...paradoxically, profoundly deepened—by Christ's reinterpretation of the Law."²¹⁷ And indeed, the very reason *why* born again Believers are to follow the Torah is because the Messiah Himself bids us to (Matthew 5:18-19), and **Messiah followers** must undoubtedly consider His interpretation of Moses' Teaching to be prime!

As the pastor says, the veil of the Old Covenant can indeed be removed in Messiah Yeshua. **But the veil is not the Torah.** The veil represents the ministry of death/condemnation, which if unresolved will result in permanent exile from the Creator. The gospel message of salvation in Yeshua is available to free us from the penalty pronounced upon sinners in the Torah, the Old Covenant, and **enact the New Covenant whereby the Torah can be supernaturally written on our hearts.**²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Ibid., 203.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 204 fn#33.

²¹⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this subject matter, consult Chapter 8, "What is the New Covenant?"