

## The New Testament Validates Torah

unnecessary barriers between people and the Father. In so doing, Yeshua would be able to bring Jewish people and those from the nations together as *kainon anthrōpon* (καίνον ἄνθρωπον)<sup>304</sup> or “**one new humanity**” (Ephesians 2:15c, NRSV/CJB/TNIV) in Him.

It is only at the foot of Yeshua’s cross where redemption for all people can be found, and reconciliation between all people can be enacted (Ephesians 2:16). Paul asserts, “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18), as the true unity that God desires among the redeemed can only be found in the work of His Son. A significant effect of this, which Paul explains to the non-Jewish Believers of Asia Minor, is “you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens<sup>305</sup> with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:19). **They are a part of the community of Israel**, as a direct result of their faith in Israel’s Messiah. The assembly that the Messiah has established has been built up by the faithful work of both apostles and prophets, made to be like the Jerusalem Temple—but one composed of people filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Yeshua the Messiah never came and eliminated the Torah, as per His crucial admonition in Matthew 5:17-19. Rather, the wall that He broke down was that of Rabbinical addition and/or manipulation to the commandments that had separated the non-Jews coming to faith from inclusion in Israel. It was never the Torah or Pentateuch *itself* that caused a wall of division to be erected not permitting the outsider from becoming a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Certain Rabbinical ordinances or dogmas not found in the Torah ultimately led to a barrier wall being constructed on the Temple Mount, and caused this separation to take place.<sup>306</sup>

### Philippians 3:9

**Pastor:** Philippians 3:9: Righteousness is not derived by the Law.

**“[A]nd may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”**

The pastor is correct in his statement here that “Righteousness is not derived by the Law.” In any defense of the validity of the Torah’s code of conduct for born again Believers today, it needs to be made absolutely and abundantly clear that righteousness or justification (*dikaïosunē*, δικαιοσύνη)—whether it is how we are each to be cleansed of our sins and/or reckoned as a part of God’s people—is *entirely contingent* on who Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is. His atoning sacrifice on the tree at Golgotha (Calvary) was required to secure eternal redemption for all people, as sin is a universal problem for fallen humanity (cf. Romans 5).

Paul’s letter to the Philippians, at only four chapters, is somewhat of a conundrum to many of today’s Messianic Believers. Many within our faith community see statements like “**not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law**” (NIV), and mistakenly think that Paul is anti-Torah. It is frequently overlooked how Ancient Philippi was largely a retired Roman military colony, and how within this city was an intense Roman patriotism.<sup>307</sup> Many

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<sup>304</sup> Note how the term *anēr* (ἄνθρωπος) or “male” is not employed here, but the more general term for humankind. An inclusive language rendering here is to be preferred.

<sup>305</sup> Grk. *ouketi este xenoi kai paroikoi alla este sumpolitai* (οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται).

<sup>306</sup> For a further discussion of these and the relevant surrounding passages, consult the author’s article “The Message of Ephesians” and his commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>307</sup> For a review, consult J. Finegan, “Philippi,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 3:786-787; G.L. Borchert, “Philippi,” in *ISBE*, 3:834-836; Holland L. Hendrix, “Philippi,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:313-317.

within the community of Philippian Messiah followers could have once been retired soldiers who had achieved great things on behalf of Caesar and the Empire. What would these things now mean in view of the salvation of Yeshua? All Paul can do is express a few things about his own personal achievements as a Jewish person:

“[A]lthough I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the [assembly]; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah” (Philippians 3:4-8).

Is the Apostle Paul being negative about his Jewish background? He is not in terms of the great value the Jewish people certainly have as the remnant of Israel, and how to them “belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises” (Romans 9:4). Paul is, however, quite clear that *his human pedigree*—which includes recognition of the One True God and significant acts of conformity to the Torah—was ultimately a loss. Paul says, “I consider everything a disadvantage in comparison with the supreme value of knowing the Messiah Yeshua as my Lord” (Philippians 3:8a, CJB). He continues, attesting,

**“[I intend to be] found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith”** (Philippians 3:9).

The vantage point of understanding Philippians 3:9 is actually not too difficult to compute: if Paul can regard his personal Jewish achievements in association with the Torah to be *skubalon* (σκύβαλον), “refuse” (Philippians 3:8, RSV) or feces,<sup>308</sup> in light of what Yeshua the Messiah has done—**what would this mean for the personal achievements of any Roman Philippians?** If what Paul had done prior to knowing Yeshua, which to a large degree was in conformity to God’s Word (excluding his persecution of the Believers, obviously)—is to be regarded as “dung” (KJV)—then the non-Jewish Philippians’ achievements would be *worse than dung!*

Anyone who has experienced the transformative power of the gospel in his or her heart can understand how Paul says that righteousness does not come *ek nomou* (ἐκ νόμου) or “**out of law,**” but rather *dia pisteōs Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ), “through the Messiah’s faithfulness” (Philippians 3:9, CJB)<sup>309</sup> or His obedience unto death for sinful humanity. Anything we have done of ourselves—even in the presumed name of “righteousness”—will not merit us anything before the Throne of the Almighty. In the estimation of J.A. Motyer, “A certificate of good behaviour which we have awarded to ourselves is not enough to give us confidence as we face the judgment of God.”<sup>310</sup> As Paul further states, his life’s intention is to be conformed, **as closely as possible**, to the example modeled to Him by his Lord:

“[T]hat I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11).

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<sup>308</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 149 informs us, “students usually enjoy being told, which is the truth, that the best translation of this is ‘shit’ or ‘crap,’ though the word can simply mean ‘kitchen scraps’ or ‘garbage.’”

<sup>309</sup> This rendering takes the clause to be a subjective genitive, rather than an objective genitive as is frequently seen in most translations: “through faith in Christ” (NASU). Consult Chapter 12, “The Faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” for a further explanation.

<sup>310</sup> J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 165.

## The New Testament Validates Torah

Some have used Paul's comments in Philippians 3:9 as meaning that Paul no longer considered the Torah or his Jewish heritage as being important. Fee's comments have both some truth, but also some problems, to them:

"Circumcision—and all other forms of Torah observance—means to 'boast' in human achievement; and its 'blamelessness' is expressed in ways that count for nothing at all. One is thus neither righteous in the sense of being rightly related to God nor righteous in the sense of living rightly as an expressing of that relationship."<sup>311</sup>

Fee is correct in asserting that the Apostle Paul would not think of his righteous status in Messiah Yeshua on any basis other than what He has done on the cross (cf. Philippians 3:4); Fee is incorrect in asserting that Paul would disregard any kind of obedience to the Torah as meaningless or as only a means to boast, precisely because the Holy Spirit has been granted to the redeemed in order to compel them to conformity with God's Torah (cf. Romans 8:4). If he had stopped at saying that Paul's confidence in his human achievements/Torah observance as a non-Believer was insufficient for redemption, Messianic Believers would not have a problem. But, too many of today's Christian theologians are just too tempted to incorrectly conclude that proper living, in emulation of the Messiah, does not include any kind of obedience to Moses' Teaching. The sphere of one's relationship with the Creator is certainly to be the redemption provided by Yeshua; obedience to the Torah is, however, required by Yeshua of His followers (cf. Matthew 5:17-19).

The Source of Paul's righteousness and his central focus for living *is the Messiah*. Paul desires above all things to be identified with the Messiah in his life, and be identified with His sufferings. Like Paul, we should each desire to be identified with Yeshua as well, and it is for such a reason why we should follow the Torah. **But we should not be following the Torah for the sake of following the Torah.** Our obedience to God's Instruction should be principally evidenced *by our love for one another*, and by us being a positive testimony to those around us via deeds of kindness and service. People should see the strong spiritual fulfillment we have and wonder why—as good works usher forth from hearts which have been supernaturally transformed! People should see that we have true spiritual discernment and that we have the answers to difficult life questions, because we are grounded in an ethic that begins with God's Torah.<sup>312</sup>

## Colossians 2:14

**Pastor:** Colossians 2:14: Christ took the decrees out of the way on the cross.

**"[H]aving canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."**

Colossians 2:14 is the common verse that is quoted by many Christians to assert that "the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ." But is this truly what is being said in Colossians 2:14? Did the Torah truly get nailed to the cross, with its high and holy standard of conduct nullified for the post-resurrection era? Could the idea that "the Law was nailed to the cross," be little more than a sound byte that fails to take into consideration the actual issues present in the surrounding context?

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<sup>311</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 232.

<sup>312</sup> For a further discussion of these and the relevant surrounding passages, consult the author's article "The Message of Philippians" and his commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*.