

What was Nailed to the Cross and Is the Law Good?

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Shabbat Shalom Brethren,

We begin this series with Colossian 2:13-14.

This comes from the books by Ariel & D'vorah Berkowitz. One is called Torah rediscovered and the other is Take Hold. I highly recommend you each add these to your libraries.

Colossian 2:13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made a live together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.(NKLV)

There are some who assume that the subject of this passage is the Torah and that the Torah was nailed to the cross with Yahshua, thereby rendering it either inoperable or cancelling it altogether. They get that impression by the surface reading of the words, 14 having cancelled 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. (NAS) According to this interpretation, the Torah is represented by the words 'certificate of debt consisting of decrees'.

This passage, however, provides us with a classic example of how necessary it is to study the scriptures in their original language along with their original cultural context. In being faithful to this hermeneutic it becomes clear that the Torah, as a document, is not the subject of this passage. Taking this into account we can come away from this passage with a completely different impression than many received it in English without reference to the Greek. The Greek in question is the phrase that is commonly translated "certificate of debt.... having nailed it to the cross."

According to scholar Adolf Deissman, "Some ancient customs connected with the law of debt must be at the root of the celebrated passage in Colossians 2:14 where the technical expression "Handwriting" (=bond) is employed in a religious sense and brought into a

remarkable connection with the cross. Christ, says the apostle, has forgiven us all debts incurred by our trespasses.”

Finding himself unable to specify specifically the custom to which Paul refers, Deissman, nevertheless, comments:

“If we are unable to point to the source of the ‘bond nailed to the cross’, it may be at least allowed in passing to refer to “the cross on the bond”. We have learnt from the new texts [he is writing in 1922!] that it was generally customary to cancel a bond [a debt] by crossing it out with the Greek cross-Chi (X).” Quoted from Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient east, page 332-333.

In essence the X stood for the phrase, “I cross out.”

Colossians 2:16-17

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. NAS

Some people refer to this verse to say that believers in Yahshua should not practice the mo’adim taught in Leviticus 23.

We begin our analysis with Paul’s statement in verse 5. Here he writes how delighted he is to see how orderly they are and how firm is their faith in Messiah. He follows this praise with an exhortation to continue to live in Him in this manner and to see to it that no one takes them captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Messiah. This is hardly a description of Torah. Continuing on through the passage, this description of the apostle’s warning is coupled with the rest of his warnings found in verses 16-23. When we make this connection, we have an exact description of man’s age old tendency of creating from God’s word an intricately complicated system of do’s and don’ts to which one is held accountable. This system is then accompanied by a sophisticated philosophy designed to awe the hearer into accepting these pious reasons for submitting themselves to these burdensome laws.

Please note that here Paul reminds them of their original doctrine. Their doctrine is the reason why they are to not embrace any reasoning that leads to any form of man-made rules and regulations, no matter how clever the presentation may be (verses 9-15).

Verse 16, then picks up with, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day- these things which are a {mere} shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Messiah.” It is possible to render verse 17 in a slightly different manner by translating it” These things are a shadow of what is to come, the body of Messiah.” We know this is quite a different translation

than which is found in most English versions. However, it is perfectly consistent with the Greek text (although not consistent with many people's theology!)

The second phrase, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (?? ?? ????? ???????), is that which is in question. The particle ?? is usually rendered as a contrasting particle, such as "but" or "however". Yet, it does not have to be understood in that way. In fact, sometimes, it is not even translated. (Arndt and Gingrich, op. Cit., 170). Granted, the word order in this phrase might imply that a contrast is intended. However, we do not see it that way. The next words are rather simple. They mean literally, "the body of Messiah". Putting this verse together then, we can understand it to mean that the practices of Torah described in Colossian 2:16 are shadows of that which was to become a reality, the body of Messiah. Having the real thing with us is, of course, the best. However, although the Torah illustrates or foreshadows realities of the body of Messiah, that does not make it useless or unimportant.. We are merely to interpret it with its fullest intended meaning, that is, with the understanding that it pictures the person and work of the Messiah and life in His body.

Thus rather than imploring believers to cease obeying the Torah, Colossians 2:16-17 provides us with the real motive for obeying the teachings of the Torah. We are to obey them with the intention of seeing the Messiah in them. We are not, however to use them as a club with which to hit those on the head who do not obey them! In other words, we are not to judge others in their practice of Torah.

Let us look at another controversial verse;

1Timothy 1:8-11

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

Whenever we have written concerning the Torah we have stated the Torah was given to the redeemed and describes their intended lifestyle. This passage seems to teach the opposite. Paul states, "the fact that law is not made for a righteous person...." Should we adjust our position concerning the Torah?

Not at all! The correct understanding of this passage requires noting a subtle difference between two different usages of the word "law" (nomos). The first time it is used is in verse 8 "But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully". Here, we can observe two things about the word "law". First, it is used with a definite article ("the") in the Greek. This would imply that the Torah is in view, and not the legalistic concept of "law".

Second, Paul describes the Torah as “good”. He says that it is good if it is used properly. What was a proper use of it? Paul’s relationship to Timothy can provide a good example of proper usage. As noted above, Paul encouraged Timothy—who was already made righteous through the blood of Messiah—to be circumcised. Moreover, he also writes to Timothy that the Torah (as well as the rest of the Tanach) is profitable; “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) These were, indeed, proper usages of the Torah. The letter to the Galatians is an example of how the Torah can be misused—as a means of attempting to earn or to keep one’s salvation. Changing the Torah from Yahweh’s Words of Life to the redeemed and making it into “law” would be a misuse of Torah. This leads us to the second usage of the word “law”. Verse 9 tells us, “law is not made for a righteous person”. Here, there is no definite article in the Greek before the word “law” Judging from the previous uses of this grammatical construction, there is a good chance that the Torah is not in view here, but that pernicious theological concept called “law”. Indeed “law” is not for righteous people. They have nothing to do with law. Instead they have been given Torah! On the other hand, sinners are associated with law. Not only do they always approach Yahweh by means of legalism, but the only things Yahweh’s laws can do for them is to condemn them and point them to Messiah. At that point, Yahweh’s Torah takes over and instructs them in their new identity as new creations constituted by the righteousness of Yahweh through their new birth.

End of book excerpt.

Brethren, read this over carefully and prayerfully before you send me hate mail. We have much more to cover in the weeks to come. I hope you will read this with an heart to learn and to understand.

May Yahweh watch over you and guide you in your spiritual growth and to know only the truth.

Shabbat Shalom,

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