

# WHY YOU WANT TO OBSERVE TORAH

by Herman Ohlhoff

I *want* to keep the Law. The Torah. Yes, the Old Testament Commandments dictated to Moses on Mount Sinai. Funny thing is, I'm not a Jew. I am a Gentile Believer in Yeshua (Jesus), born and raised in the Charismatic Church where I was faithfully trained to understand that the Law is synonymous with legalism, walking in the flesh and sin.

However, in the last few years I've heard a different kind of teaching. One that validates the Torah as a part of the New Covenant, and encourages believers to re-examine our perspective on what Paul describes as "*holy and just and good*" (Rom. 7:12 [NKJV]).

So now I find a yearning within me...an excitement about ...a genuine desire - to obey the Old Testament Commandments. What is going on here? Am I stepping into the age-old trap of legalism? Is this my flesh rising up to strive for self-righteousness? Or is this really something God is doing?

I suspect that I am not the only one that has asked these questions. Particularly, after facing some challenging questions from some of your well-meaning friends in the church, who do not quite see things your way yet.

If you can identify with these questions, then I trust that this article will be of some help and comfort to you.

Let's begin by looking at some prophecies describing what would happen in the New Covenant:

## Old Testament Prophecies about the New Covenant

**Jeremiah 31:31-33** "31 *Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—*  
32 *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,[a] says the LORD.*  
33 *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."* [NKJV]

This reference in Jeremiah describes what God will do in the New Covenant. Most Charismatic Christians are probably familiar with this text, but I suspect the typical interpretation is limited to the fact that the New Covenant results in a **change of heart**. If we examine it carefully though, it is clear that this change specifically relates to God's Torah (law) being inscribed upon our hearts and minds.

Ok, so according to this scripture, if you are a New Covenant Believer God has put His Torah (law) in your mind and has written it on your heart.

I would say that most Christians would probably not have a problem accepting that this is true. Having something in your mind and written on your heart doesn't necessarily mean that you are doing those things, right? But what does that mean exactly?

Let's look at another prophecy about the New Covenant:

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** *"26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.  
27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."* [NKJV]

In this reference we see that not only will we receive a new heart, but we will also receive the Spirit of God, and that the Spirit would be put inside us. Again, up to this point I would not expect any traditional Christian theologian to object.

The problem comes with the next bit, where we see that the New Covenant will not only result in a change of heart, but also a **change in behaviour**. Specifically, we are told that the Spirit will cause us **'to walk in'**, **'to keep'** and **'to do'** the various aspects of the Torah (law). Hmmm, that can't be right, can it?

Mind you, it does have a similar idea to the teaching of the Apostle James...

**James 2:17** *"17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."*

I submit to you that these scriptures teach us the following about the New Covenant:

- God gives us a **new heart**
- God puts His **Spirit inside of us**
- God **writes the Law on our hearts**
- God puts the **Law in our minds**
- God's Spirit in us **causes us to 'walk in', 'keep' and 'do' the Commandments**

If you will allow me to read between the lines a bit, this is how I think it works: God's Spirit living inside us puts the Law into our minds and writes in on our hearts. Having the Law on our hearts creates the **desire** to obey the Law. Having the Law in our minds creates the proper **understanding** of how to obey the Law.

Based on this, I think that having a desire to obey the Law is a valid part of our New Covenant faith.

However, we have only considered scriptures from the Old Testament. Let's look at the New Testament to see if we can find any evidence to support this view.

## New Testament Teachings

Seeing as the section above links the work of the Spirit in the believer to the desire to obey Torah, a good place to start will be Paul's discussion on the topic of living according to the Spirit in Romans 8.

**Romans 8: 1, 5-7** *"1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,[a] who **do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**" [NKJV]*

From the start of the discourse it is clear that living according to the Spirit is what the believer should be doing.

*5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.  
6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.  
7 Because the **carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.**  
8 So then, **those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** [NKJV]*

In verse 7 we see that the carnal (fleshly) mind is enmity against God, because it is **not subject to the Law of God**. As a result of this those who live according to the flesh cannot please God.

So if not being subject to the Law of God is enmity against God and results in not pleasing God, then the opposite must also be true. In other words, being subject to the Law of God must then be in harmony with God and must be pleasing to God.

We can also deduce that if the carnal mind is enmity against God because it **is not subject** to the Law of God, then to be spiritually minded can only be peace with God because **it is subject to the Law of God**.

This confirms what the prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretold i.e. that God's Spirit would be put inside us and that the Spirit would cause us to obey the Law of God.

**Romans 7: 14-24** *"14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.  
15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.  
16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, **I agree with the law that it is good.**  
17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.  
18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.  
19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.  
20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.  
21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.  
22 **For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.***

23 *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*  
24 *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*  
25 *I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*  
**So then, with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the Law of sin.**

In the well-known section above, Paul makes the following statements about his attitude towards the Law of God:

- He agrees that the Law is good
- That he delights in the Law of God according to the inner man
- That with the mind he serves the Law of God

Again, all of these statements are in alignment with the prophecies. Clearly the Spirit has put the Law of God in Paul's mind and he has a yearning in his spirit to obey the Law.

### **Is it really God's will that I obey Torah?**

At this point we might be starting to ask the question "Is it really God's will that I obey the law?" Let's look at some more scripture to see if we can answer this question:

**Psalm 40:7-8** "7 *Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me.*  
8 *I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your Law is within my heart.*"[NKJV]

Psalm 40 is a prophecy of the Messiah. We see in verse 8 that the Messiah (Jesus) delights to do the Will of God and that this is linked to the Law being within His heart.

This is similar to Paul stating that he delights in the Law of God according to the inward man in Rom 7:22.

Another interesting point comes from the following text in Romans:

**Romans 2:17-18** "17 *Indeed[a] you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,*  
18 *and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law,* [NKJV]

While we know that this section forms part of a larger argument where Paul instructs the Jew that relying on his observance of Torah will not result in salvation, we again find the connection of God's Will with the Torah (Law).

Note that Paul does not say 'and you **think** you know His will but are actually *misguided*' about the Jews he is addressing.

Rather he acknowledges that they do know God's Will because they have been instructed out of the Law.

We've already learnt that the Spirit of God inside us will place a desire in our hearts to obey the Law.

In **1 Thes. 5:19** we are instructed *"Do not quench the Spirit."*

**Philippians 2:13** *"13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."*

## Attitude is everything

The scriptures are very clear about one thing: observance of Torah (or any other set of rules, including New Testament 'principles') will **never** be the basis for anyone's salvation. **Never**.

Ephesians 2:8: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—"*

Whenever we attempt to present our actions or deeds before God to prove our merit for receiving His love, salvation, grace or blessing, it is an insult to the Cross. These things are all free gifts given by grace and received by faith. Obeying the Torah with this attitude is definitely not God's Will for us.

While this truth is firmly established within Christian theology, I submit to you that we have been so afraid of legalism that we have aggressively rejected the notion that there is any place for Torah observance within our faith.

Ironically, we have introduced a reverse form of bondage to the Law. Pharisaic doctrine condemned those who did not observe Torah. Christian doctrine now condemns those who do.

What used to be the evidence of righteous living and a heart after God has now become the opposite: evidence of a person far from God and in bondage to legalism.

The problem is that this is in contradiction with what Yeshua Himself taught:

**Matthew 5:17-19** *"17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.  
18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.  
19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; **but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**" [NKJV]*

This scripture makes it clear that those who observe Torah and teach others to do so will be esteemed by God, not despised.

So, we know that legalism is not what God wants, but He is in favour of Torah observance. This implies that there is an observance of Torah that is not based on a legalistic attitude, but rather on faith.

## Conclusion

If you are a Christian and have discovered a desire within yourself to observe God's Law, be encouraged. Do not regard this attitude as something representing a lack of faith in the Cross or a sinful self-righteousness as some would see it.

Know that according to scripture you are free to observe God's Torah without condemnation, and that God will esteem your desire to do so.

**Colossians 2:16** *“16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”*

Always remember that we are never to rely on or boast in our observance of Torah, but should walk in humility before God and man placing our full trust and confidence in the finished work of the Cross.

Guard your heart against pride, condemnation and judgement. Each of these attitudes is often present in those on both sides of the Torah observance debate. Each of these attitudes is equally sinful, harmful and dishonouring towards God.

And finally always measure your understanding and observance against the acid test of the following scriptures:

**Luke 10:27** *“So he answered and said, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘**your neighbor as yourself.**””*

**Romans 13:8** *“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he **who loves another has fulfilled the law.**”*

**John 13:35** *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love for one another.**”*

**AMEN**