

Returning To An Objective Morality

Part 2

Welcome back to Returning to an Objective Morality. This is the second part of this 2-part series.

After Germany lost WWII, the German Nazi leaders were put on trial at Nuremberg. Recently I visited that very courtroom; it was quite moving. The trial was unprecedented, and so a basic legal argument arose over which law code ought to be used to judge these men. The Nazi defendants' attorney claimed that to try these men using anything other than Germany's existing law code would be ex post facto: that is, trying them on laws that didn't exist for them at the time of the claimed offenses, and for which, they therefore bore no legal obligation. In fact, a number of International Law authorities that were not German agreed with that legal theory, which has been a principle of law in the Western world for a long time. The chief prosecutor at the trials, Robert H. Jackson, however, appealed to the existence of permanent, immutable values and morals that transcended culture and time. He argued it by saying that there had to exist a system of objective moral law and human ethics the basis of which does not, and by its nature cannot, rest within the finite world. Otherwise, how could anyone, in good faith, come to the conclusion that what the Nazis did was wrong?

This brings us to dealing with that elephant in the room that I spoke of to end Part 1 of this talk on the subject of returning to an objective morality. In order to approach it carefully so as not to get trampled, I want to sneak up on it by proposing a very simple question. Who determines morality? Who determines what is evil?

When we claim that there is such a thing as evil, it is an admission that there is necessarily such a thing as good. And when we accept that there is good that is apart from evil, we acknowledge that there is such a thing as morality. But, on that premise we also must necessarily agree that good can only be based on a system of moral laws and rules that comes from some source of authority. Otherwise, there is no way for us to know about good and evil, or to define good and evil, and therefore no way for us to differentiate between good and evil...and in the end, to enforce it. It follows, then, that since there does exist a known

moral law of good and evil, there must necessarily be a moral lawgiver. But whom might this be? The Judeo-Christian world claims to operate on the belief that the moral lawgiver is God and that it is He that has given to us a code of morality. But, in practice, does Christianity actually base its doctrines and conduct itself on this belief of a code of morality that, at the least, applies to worshippers of God?

Another critical element of the moral law that we agree must exist is this: is this code an objective or a subjective one? Are the morals we are to follow and obey spelled out in absolute terms or are they flexible or even changeable with time and circumstance? Might they even be highly individualized? The atheist philosopher Louise Anthony writes:

"I take it that theists and atheists will agree about what it means to say that our morality is objective; first whether something is right or wrong does not depend on any human being's attitudes toward it, and second, moral facts are independent of the human will".

Therefore, as followers of Christ and worshippers of the God of Heaven, if we agree that by its very nature a heaven-sent moral law is an objective one, and its source is an eternal and unchanging God, then the laws of morality out of sheer necessity must be presented to humans as coming from outside the sphere of humanity... as something not created by human government or doctrine. But, this God-ordained moral code must also be given in a way that we can know and apply. It must be rational to our minds, and operable within this physical Universe we all live in. We must be intellectually equipped to be able to sort through it in order to make decisions to comply with it. Even the question of what things in our lives fall into the category of morality (good things we are always obligated to do or bad things we are not to do) versus a different and separate category of decisions and behaviors that amounts to our personal preferences (something in which we have been given the choice to use our individual human wills to determine, without divine consequence for our choices) can only be determined by the lawgiver as to which is which.

So then, as humans, how *do* we apprehend that moral law code from God the lawgiver so that we might follow it in obedience? God seems to have imparted

the knowledge of it in two steps. The first step, after the Garden of Eden disgrace of Adam and Eve, was to give all humans an intrinsic, inner-sense within our souls that there exists a mysterious unseen thing called morality; that is, there is a universal code of right and wrong. Paul wrote about this mystery in Romans 2:14, 15.

NAS Romans 2:14-15 ***¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,***

This is a statement that says that all humanity (Jews and gentiles alike) has a natural God-given sense of right and wrong built-in to us. However, this innate sense of right and wrong proved much too ethereal and theoretical for humanity to operate under as the world's population grew and, so, something more concrete was needed. Enter step two when the only written moral law code in the Holy Scriptures... the moral law code given to mankind by the divine lawgiver... was brought into existence: The Law of Moses.

Here is where this line of thinking leads us for the remainder of our time together today as we deal with that dangerous and pesky elephant in the room. Does the moral law code that God gave to Moses still matter? Does it continue to have relevance or authority? If so, for whom? Even more pointedly, should it have any effect on the life of a Believer in Yeshua... especially a modern one?

Outside of salvation itself, I contend that there is no more important question for the Church and Synagogue... and for individual Believers... to answer. I'm going to tell you the answer to this question truthfully, and truth is rarely comfortable. I want this to be personal for you... because it is. So don't be mistaken and think such a determination about the Law of Moses is above your pay grade. This is for each of you to struggle with, get angry at, cry about, complain and wish you hadn't heard what you are about to hear from me because it is at the very heart of what it means for you to be a Believer in the God of Bible; to validate your claim to be a follower of Christ.

In order to get anywhere today I'm necessarily going to have to make a few generalizations that while they apply broadly, clearly don't apply universally without exception (much the way a proverb works). So, to oversimplify the traditional Christian views on the Law of Moses into a single general one it would be this: God's moral law code given to us through the Law of Moses is not for any who believe that Jesus of Nazareth is their Savior. This viewpoint is spoken of in a few ways in Churches, with perhaps the most familiar being that Believers are no longer "under the Law" (a statement that has been ascribed to Paul).

Some of the more familiar ways this "no longer under the Law" doctrine is explained is that the Law was 100% abolished, demolished and discarded by Christ, with it regularly said to have been nailed to the Cross and replaced by The Law of Love. Or that the Law was only for a particular dispensation (one among several dispensations) that was meant to last only between the eras of Moses and Jesus. However, to accept this belief leads us to a troubling but intellectually honest consequence about what such a philosophy about the Law necessarily tells us. It is that the New Testament revelation of Christ must have redefined sin and what obedience to God amounts to; and whatever it is, it can no longer be tied to an intrinsic and universal moral law code supernaturally placed within all humans, nor to the written objective moral law code we find in the Bible that was said to have been given to humans by God on a permanent basis: the Law of Moses. If one accepts such a notion then it follows that sin can no longer have a universal meaning or standard. Therefore, sin and morality can be somewhat different for each individual and it depends on how "we feel in our hearts or consciences". This source of morality then is usually ascribed by the Church to the unique and highly individualistic workings of the Holy Spirit within us. That is, upon Yeshua's death, the moral law changed from being objective (the Law of Moses) to subjective (what the Holy Spirit says is right and wrong for us, individually) From absolute and universal, to flexible and individualistic. This is typically expressed in Christian sayings such as "what is sin for me isn't necessarily sin for you". Or, "if the Holy Spirit doesn't tell me something is sin, then I have no obligation to obey it". So, according to the Constantinian Church where do we look in the Bible to understand how Christians are to relate to the Law of Moses? Nearly exclusively, it is to the various epistles of Paul.

As we follow where this foundational Christian doctrine of sin leads us...a doctrine of sin being subjective to the point that it is individually customized... intellectual honesty and simple logic suggest that Church leadership probably ought to no longer refer to the Body of Believers as being the Church of Christ, but rather as the Church of Paul. While this doesn't suggest that Paul rather than Christ saves, on the other hand it is agreed to by Bible scholars that the bulk of Church doctrine on almost all theological subjects is based predominately on Paul's biblical statements because of his work with gentiles, and because the Church is fundamentally a gentile religion and organization. It is Paul's statements that are used nearly exclusively to define the Constantinian Church doctrine that the moral law code that God gave to Israel, through Moses, is dead to Believers and perhaps it is even to be regarded as a bad or defective thing from its inception, and thus it is to be avoided.

In opposition to that rather common line of thinking I contend that essentially various Christian teachers and scholars have (for hundreds of years) "cherry picked" through Paul's many statements concerning the Law, taking out of context the ones that seem to validate their worldview and ignoring the ones that plainly contradict them. They do so in order to invalidate the Law as they see it as something the Jews followed and therefore the gentile Church should not.

It is no secret that Paul presents a challenge on the issue of the Law as he seems to hold an utterly schizophrenic assessment of its place for Believers by one time seeming to say that the Law has no bearing on the life of a Believer (Believers are not "under the law") and at another time he venerates the Law and says that a Believer should uphold the Law ("Therefore the Law is holy, just and good"). We even find in chapter 21 of Acts that Paul, well after meeting Christ on the road to Damascus, went to the Temple and participated in a vow ritual required by the Law of Moses (even paying for other Jews to do the same) specifically to publicly demonstrate that he personally remained devoted to the Law of Moses so that people would STOP accusing him of instructing Jews and gentiles that trust in Christ meant they didn't have to obey the Law of Moses any longer. Was Paul being hypocritical in his actions and merely succumbing to peer pressure in doing this?

While Paul has always been controversial and challenging to decipher, yet there is much he says that is straightforward and consistent enough that it can help set the context for understanding where he is coming from in his letters that, in time, became the core of the NT and of Constantinian Church doctrine. For instance: I can say with confidence that Paul believes that God sent Yeshua to bring salvation from sin to Jews and gentiles alike; that salvation is available to all on the same basis (faith in God); that the Messiah is coming back sooner than later; that Paul felt specially anointed by God to take the Gospel of Salvation to gentiles; and that followers of Christ should live according to The Father's will and objective moral law code. Yet, we need to keep in mind something so many otherwise good Bible teachers and scholars seem to minimize: Paul AND Christ were Jews. The society they lived in, their upbringing, the religion they were taught, their cultural history, and the terms they thought and spoke in were Jewish.

There are a handful of Christian academics who have made valiant attempts to deal with Paul and the Law while trying to overcome long held Christian doctrinal barriers and the most recent academic that I believe offers a more balanced view is the venerable E.P. Sanders.

Professor Sanders, Dean of Biblical Exegesis at Oxford, found that indeed there seems to be conflicting instructions about the Law by Paul. And therefore, on the surface, Paul's statements on the matter present (in E.P. Sanders words) "the profile of a Biblical Apostle who changes his mind about it day to day". Or perhaps his mind changes circumstance to circumstance, or he is internally conflicted on the matter and we are witnessing him wrestle with the Law in light of Messiah's advent. In reality, however, says Sanders the problem in properly understanding Paul is that we are stubbornly reading and interpreting him through the lens, cultures and literary styles of gentile Westerners while his meaning is wrapped up in a 1st century Jewish cultural mindset that Christians don't have any idea of or interest in knowing.

E.P. Sanders concludes that the real issue is that Paul is actually speaking on several DIFFERENT aspects of the role of the Law in the life of a Believer, and they can't be all lumped together. That is, Paul did not usually speak about the Law in broad terms, but rather he would address a specific issue about the Law

one time, and another but different specific issue about the Law the next time. I couldn't agree more with Dr. Sanders and what we find is that Paul separated the issue of the Law down to two fundamental aspects as concerns Believers: **the first** issue is how the Law relates to justification (salvation), and **the second** issue is how the Law relates to our morality, which in turn dictates our proper choices (that is, the Law as the expected expression of God's code of good and evil for His worshippers). The first issue, salvation (justification) Paul presents as a spiritual matter expressed by a trusting relationship with God while the second issue, behavior, is more of a practical everyday life matter expressed by our proper actions and relations with people that indeed are governed by God's moral law code.

Before we discuss a few points that Paul made about the Law, I would like to present a proposition that I hope can provide a platform to reveal the answer to the 2 most basic questions Believers have concerning the Law: first, does it still exist for us and second, if it does are we obligated to obey it? My position on this crucial matter is based on a clear, plainly stated instruction that appears around the midway point through Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount. In addition to its powerful and jarring clarity, what makes it so impactful is that the Sermon on the Mount is Christ's seminal speech to ALL of His followers (Jews and gentiles), and it is a speech that Christianity has held up as a core-essential to proper understanding of our faith.

CJB Matthew 5: 17-20 ¹⁷ *"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.* ¹⁸ *Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.* ¹⁹ *So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.* ²⁰ *For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!*

I don't know which Bible version you might have in your hands, but there is no discernable difference among the versions other than where most versions say "The Law" the CJB says "The Torah". Literally, the Hebrew original is Torah, not

Law. However, those two terms are close enough to synonymous for our purposes today, so there is no need to quibble; either is appropriate.

My stance and conviction are based on what we just read in that whatever purpose the Law serves today, and however much of it can be followed literally as biblically prescribed, in no way has Christ abolished it or even changed parts of it. I'll say it another way: the God-given objective moral law for humanity has not changed, nor has the source of it changed, and it is anything but subjective or individualistic... at least according to Jesus. Therefore, Church doctrines about the Law ought to revolve around helping Believers to relate to and obey the Law in the spirit they were intended, instead of declaring that the Law no longer exists for Believers. Some have argued that when Yeshua said He came to "fulfill" the Law He meant to end it or to abolish it; but that is inaccurate on its face, simply because that it isn't what the Greek word in the text says or means. The Greek word being translated as fulfilled is *pleroo* and it means to complete or to fulfill in the sense of bringing something to its fullest state (as in saying my spouse completes me as a person). But beyond that, the reality is that Yeshua didn't end His thought on the Law as it pertains to His followers there; He supplemented His statement about coming to fulfill the Law by continuing that not only are the Law and the Prophets NOT abolished, but that not one iota of the Law shall change until heaven and earth passes away. Additionally, anyone who teaches that the Law is abolished or changed will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Please note: NOT necessarily barred from being a member of the Kingdom of Heaven, just assigned (for all eternity) to be assigned to the lowest possible status a Kingdom member could hold. Pretty definitive. And BTW, being the least in the Kingdom is certainly not something any Believer ought to aspire to. I promise you that if you work towards being the least of anything, you will certainly achieve it.

Because Christ's statement on the uninterrupted continuation of the Law of Moses for those who believe in Him directly contradicts most standard Church doctrines on the Law, I've had some students, teachers and Pastors try to solve the problem of Christ's statement by pointing towards His comment that it will pass away when the heavens and earth pass away by insisting that the heavens and earth DID pass away at the foot of the cross, and therefore so did the Law. Of course, they say they mean that from a "spiritualized" or allegorized view

point. But far more often their response to what Christ said is to argue that “yeah, but here’s what **Paul** said” in Galatians or Romans or Corinthians or some other of his epistles. I am then presented with a well-known statement or two of Paul’s that indeed does seem to be quite negative about the Law. When I respond with a statement of Paul that seems to be quite positive about the Law, then once again I’m opposed with yet another one that seems negative. On and on it goes until we reach a stalemate. I’ve searched for a long time for a new approach to this challenge and I have one that I’d like to share with you that I think gets straight to the heart of the matter.

We have at least one rather long, detailed statement by Christ about the Law as concerns His followers (Matthew 5:17-20) that is more than merely positive; it is unequivocal and it is a forcefully stated instruction for us to NEVER think or persuade anyone that He came to abolish the Law. So, if one accepts the standard Church doctrine that is ascribed to Paul that Christ DID abolish the Law, then we are confronted with the obvious: Paul and Christ disagree. That is, a dynamic is created that has Paul saying Christ terminated the Law and Christ saying “no I didn’t”.

What are we to do? The mainstream institutional Church long ago decided that more weight is to be given to Paul than to Christ on this matter. Thus, we are left with a serious personal dilemma: are we to set Paul against Christ as regards the Law for Believers? And if that is the situation, do we follow Christ or do we follow Paul? Do we believe the Master or do we believe the Disciple? Do we accept the inspired words of God in the flesh, or do we accept the inspired words of a common fleshly human (Paul)?

It is a generally accepted Christian Theological principle that the Bible contains various levels of inspiration. Not all Bible characters, and not all of their statements, carry equal inspiration, weight or authority. For instance; the wicked King Saul’s statements, while accurate historically, don’t reflect the level of truth or Godly inspiration as King David’s. And King David’s statements don’t carry the level of Godly inspiration or authority as do God’s oracles given through His Prophets. Thus, the statements of Jesus, the Son of God, (who is Himself deity) carry with them the highest level of inspiration and authority when compared to David, Peter, James, John, Paul or any of the Prophets because Christ is God and

the others aren't. In fact, Paul himself pointed out this distinction in 1Corinthians 7.

CJB 1 Cor. 7:10-12 ***¹⁰ To those who are married I have a command, and it is not from me but from the Lord: a woman is not to separate herself from her husband ¹¹ But if she does separate herself, she is to remain single or be reconciled with her husband. Also, a husband is not to leave his wife. ¹² To the rest I say- I, not the Lord: if any brother has a wife who is not a believer, and she is satisfied to go on living with him, he should not leave her.***

Paul, being an intellectually honest man, says that one statement he's making is from God, but the next statement he's making is NOT from God, but rather from his own personal opinion. It's not that one of his thoughts is inspired and the other isn't; it's that a commandment from God carries the far greater weight and authority. Where did those commandments Paul is talking about come from? He took them from the Law of Moses.

If we're to approach this matter openly and with integrity this now brings us to another option. Is it possible that just as did Paul, might Christ have also given us conflicting views on the Law and so His statement in Matthew 5 is only the most positive one that He made? To that end, I went through the Gospels annotating each and every statement Christ made on the Law and on Tradition, whether that statement was negative, positive or neutral. For the sake of our discussion today since we don't have the time to discuss each of His statements I'll summarize: the only negative thing Christ had to say was not against the Law but rather was against manmade Tradition (what we today call Church doctrines). Jews regularly called these Traditions "law", even including them as part of the entire Jewish law code. What we find is that Yeshua was always neutral or positive regarding the Law of Moses (although quite negative towards manmade Tradition), and urged His followers to be obedient to it, especially as it comes to the spirit of the Law. Thus, if one continues to insist that Paul advocated against the Law, there is no option but to conclude that he held the opposite view from Our Lord Yeshua, who is God. I don't know about you, but were we to conclude that Paul indeed is anti-Law of Moses, then I have a very easy time of choosing Christ's instruction on the Law over Paul's. I'll take God's word over man's word anytime no matter how venerated or inspired that man might be.

That said, I'm going to show you that Paul's occasional negativity was not an anti-Law view at all, but rather he was instructing against misuse of the purpose of the Law. Paul was not anti-Law and did not teach Believers to ignore the Law, and especially did not teach that the Law was dead and gone. Among his several statements to this effect one of the most plainly spoken that remains definitive across all Bible versions is found in Romans 3.

CJB Romans 3:29-31 ***²⁹ Or is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, he is indeed the God of the Gentiles; ³⁰ because, as you will admit, God is one. Therefore, he will consider righteous the circumcised on the ground of trusting and the uncircumcised through that same trusting. ³¹ Does it follow that we abolish Torah (the Law) by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah.***

Whatever else Paul might have to say about the Law, what we find in Romans 3 is a key principle in Paul's overall understanding of it: it is that even though salvation comes ONLY through faith, our faith in no way cancels the Torah (the Law), which is God's objective moral law code. One doesn't nullify the other, nor does one oppose the other. Paul emphasizes his contention using the strong Jewish expression "Heaven forbid" that such a thing might be, and goes on further to say that in fact our faith (in Christ) affirms and upholds the Law (the Torah).

But there is also another important principle in this passage; it is that there is one faith, one God, and one Law for BOTH Jew and gentile (the circumcised and uncircumcised). There is ONLY one system of justification, faith in Christ, there is only one God, YHWH God of Israel, and there is only one objective moral law code, the Law of Moses.

E.P. Sanders says this about this passage: "I regard this as one of the most amazing sentences that (Paul) ever wrote". Why, asks Dr. Sanders, is this passage so amazing? Because it completely shoots down centuries of Christian anti-Law tradition. Without doubt this statement of Paul confirms Paul's view that while the Law is not for justification (not for salvation) it certainly does not follow that the Law is therefore abolished for those who trust God by means of faith in

Yeshua. The term "the circumcised" was the common way that Jews spoke of being Jews, and the term "the uncircumcised" was the common way that Jews referred to gentiles. Thus, the thought here is that a Jew should stay a Jew and a gentile should remain a gentile when they decide to trust in Christ. But what does that mean? Let's ask ourselves the photographic negative of Paul's statement. How might a Jew cease to be a Jew or a gentile cease to be a gentile in any case? Jewish society in that day saw the act of a gentile being circumcised as more than accepting the God of the Jews; it also meant that he became a national Jew. He (or she) became a legal member of Jewish society. That person was no longer a gentile; they had given up their former national, religious and ethnic identity to become Jewish.

But Paul says "no" to this as regards salvation; the requirement to be saved by faith didn't involve changing nationalities or ethnic identity. If you are a gentile, you may remain a gentile but still are justified through the blood of the Jewish Christ. If you are Jew, you may remain a Jew and your nationality doesn't change by being justified through the blood of the same Jewish Christ. Jew or gentile it doesn't matter. Paul says that what DOES matter (after receiving justification through faith) is keeping God's commandments. WHAT commandments? The only commandments... the only objective moral law code...that exist in a biblical context: the laws that form the Law of Moses. And btw: remember, Paul was speaking and writing in an era in which the ONLY Scripture in existence was what we call the OT. There would be no such thing as a NT for 2 centuries after his death.

If there is but one thing you take away from today's talk, then I hope it is that if a Christian insists that Paul preaches that the Law is dead and gone for Believers then that person is accepting that Paul is at odds with Christ who preached that the Law would remain perfectly intact down to the last detail until there was a new heavens and new earth. And by the way: is there really to be a new heavens and earth or was Christ just spiritualizing or using Jewish hyperbole to make His point, as some claim?

CJB Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there.

So, how should we, as Jewish and gentile followers of Yeshua, go forward in our lives and relate to the Law of Moses? I have received innumerable emails and face to face questions from concerned folks who will ask me about one or another of the laws of the Law of Moses and if they were obligated to do it. Must a man wear a beard? Must a woman cover her head? Should we arrest and stone adulterers to death? Can I take my kids to their soccer game on Saturdays without violating the 7th day Sabbath? Can I make any day my personal Sabbath, or should I not observe any Sabbath at all? Should I celebrate the biblical feasts? On and on it goes. Here is how we ought to think about it: The Law was given to Moses not as a much as strict, mechanical rule book but more as the structure of a divinely-given paradigm telling us how to be an obedient worshipper of God Almighty and to walk in His ways. What's a paradigm, you might ask? It's a model and a pattern explaining the underlying spirit of something, while at the same time outlining its overall shape. The American Constitution is a paradigm that does this for the particular system of government the founding fathers envisioned. It specifies national liberties as well as restrictions within which society must operate in order to properly operate as a Republic. Principles were established and boundaries created. Yet, not every detail of law and society is covered, and so when we bump into those many gray areas, or some political office decides to enact a questionable order or a law, it's the job of the Supreme Court to test and ensure that we stay within the boundaries and spirit of that original established paradigm. Even in the extensive system of Laws and Commands that God gave to Moses, it too left many gray areas, and also left some rather large subjects unaddressed and untouched. So, what were the ancient Hebrews to do about *those* things? What are we to do about them?

The answer to our very real dilemma... not some theoretical bit of theological minutia but rather something that affects our every decision and action and relationship with Our Lord... is found in the underlying substance of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, which pled with the thousands listening to Him that the spirit of the Law, and the pattern of the Torah... the Divine Paradigm...was always the point of the Law of Moses. What other possible way or form could God's moral law code...with its definitions of evil and good... have been given to mankind than in a visible, written law code that was entirely objective?

As we circle back to the opening words of part 1 of this lesson, as Cal Thomas suggested that America had lost its moral compass on account of departing from any kind of objective moral standard, then my answer to his correct assessment is to reestablish our moral compass. And the way to do that is to obey Yeshua by reestablishing the Law of Moses as that objective standard. Subjectivity has never worked either in the Church or in our national government. At the same time, it was the Church that introduced the idea of a subjective morality, falsely claiming a biblical basis. Therefore, before any nation can adopt the Law of Moses as its moral code, the Church must advocate for it. And, for those of you who are like-minded with me as Messianic, or Hebrew Roots, or whatever you call yourselves, it needs to begin with us. One person, one family, one congregation at a time

1st century Jewish culture (Yeshua's era) often struggled with the Law just as we do (or at least as we should), because by that time at least 12 centuries had passed since Moses was given it at Mt. Sinai. Yeshua's culture and their circumstances looked nothing like the ancient Israelite culture and their oppressive circumstances in Egypt, or of their 40-year journey in the wilderness, or in the early days of the Israelites in Canaan. How are we, then, so far removed from the event, to discern the spirit of the Law so that we can obey its many commandments? It begins with being devoted to the 2 foundational principles of the Law that Jesus emphasized: to love God with all our mind, soul and being; and second, to love our neighbor as ourselves. Upon that foundation was erected the 10 Commandments which outlined the basic rules of how to love God and love our fellow man. And then upon those 10 Commandments were built roughly 600 case examples of what each Commandment looked like in application in the lives of God worshippers, and what consequences were to be expected in our disobedience to them. But looking to the Bible instead of to the many varying manmade Church doctrines that each organization thinks loving God and loving our fellow man amounts to, is critical.

By taking the time to study the Law of Moses in its context and culture, and to then draw a mental picture of it as more or less the Believer's Constitution, then we can (with some effort and prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit within us) transcend time and culture and bring obedience to the Law of Moses into the 21st century and beyond, thereby obeying Christ as He instructed. Only then will we

have a true, objective moral code to live by. Otherwise, we are left to invoke the arguments of the Nazis that the only the moral law that applies to us is to be determined nation by nation, even individual by individual. A moral law that is circumstantial and that inevitably evolves over time.

Following the Law of Moses by no means says we are to reject modern technology, or our wonderful comforts, or world realities, or medical advances and return to an ancient way of life and living. Rather, we are to look to the overall Divine Paradigm set down by the Law and follow it...to the letter where still possible, but in the spirit of it, always. We must continually be seeking out the principle and the spirit behind each and every law of God; and then applying it in that way to our human circumstances which, by nature, are nearly infinite in their possibilities. The Law of Moses is not a living document that changes over time in lockstep with societal wants and desires. It is permanent and applicable to all human societies. Can some laws like the biblical kosher diet, observing the Sabbath and the biblical feasts, refusing to lie or murder, and viewing sex as sacred be directly obeyed in our time? Of course. And therefore, they should be. Other laws like regulations against intercropping or mixing materials in fabrics can be observed by understanding the spirit (the paradigm) of those laws rather than attempting to operate within the precise letter of them.

In the end, the Law of Moses and God's free gift of grace through Yeshua are not two different paths to the same end. Nor is there one moral law code for Jews and another for gentiles, nor has the older (the Law of Moses) been replaced with a newer (the Law of Love). The New Covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31 didn't create a new faith, nor did it void the Law as the creators of the Constantinian Church claimed it did. Rather it enabled us to have a deeper devotion to the Law. Faith and trust in God are, and always were, the only means to redemption. Redemption through Christ and continuance of the Law are not mutually exclusive nor are they opposed to one another; instead, they are to work hand in glove in the lives of Believers for the sake of righteousness.

God's love was magnificently shown to us by giving us the Law of Moses so that we have a firm way to know God's will for our personal conduct, and so that humanity can be at peace with Him, have harmony among ourselves, and be in

tune with the fabric of the vast, nearly incomprehensible, universe that He created.