

Which Law Are You Under?

By Steven Rees—3/08

As I have grown in my understanding and walking out of Torah over the past 6 years, I have found it necessary to step away from the traditional church structure that is found on many corners of many streets in nearly all of our towns and cities. As I have talked and studied with many people who remain within the traditional structure, one of the main points of concern that is expressed by them towards me is that they believe that I am “going back under the Law” because I desire to obey all the commands that God/YHVH has placed within His Torah. Most of the traditional church believes and teaches that Jesus/Y’shua “fulfilled” the Law and further “nailed it to the Cross” by His death on the Cross, therefore the Law is no longer binding upon us. In fact, some go so far as to believe and teach that if you try to obey the Law, you are committing an abomination and “crucifying Y’shua all over again”, as they mistakenly believe Hebrews 6:6 is referring to. I have addressed the issue of “nailing the Law to the cross” in a paper titled “What Did Jesus Nail to the Cross?”, so I will not go that direction here, but only to say that it was not the Law/Torah that was nailed to the Cross.

What I would like to address in this paper is the fact that there are two laws available for us to live “under”, either the Law of YHVH revealed in His Torah, or the Law of the Flesh. To set the stage for this understanding, let’s turn to Romans 8:

- 1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.
- 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,
- 4 in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit.
- 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
- 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot;
- 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
- 9 But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.
- 10 But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness.
- 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.
- 12 So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh--
- 13 for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.
- 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Revised Standard Version)

There are several words that we need to understand within these verses. The first is a word that is translated “law”. This is the Greek word *nomos* (Strong’s #3551) and it means prescriptive regulations, a principle, or the Law of Moses or Torah. The second word that is important to understand for this study is the one translated as “flesh” from the Greek word *sarx* (Strong’s # 4561). The meaning here is either literally the skin, or the human nature or the external or body aspect of who we are. The other word I would like to highlight for understanding is the word “spirit” from the Greek word *pneuma* (Strong’s #4151) that means air; breath; rational aspect of our soul; Holy Spirit presence or inspiration; life force as received from God.

So now with these understandings let’s go back and see what Paul is saying in these verses of Romans 8. Verse 2 sets up an understanding of 2 different laws that are opposed to each other. The first is the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”, and the second is “the law of sin and death” that Y’shua has set us free from. This is contrary to what is believed and taught within the mainstream church; that we are set free from the Torah. It is this “law of sin and death that we are set free from. The first “law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus” establishes us in Torah. In verse 7 Paul tells us that the second law, what I call the Law of the *Sarx*, is at war with the Law of YHVH, the Torah, or the Law of the *Pneuma*. These 2 laws represent the age old battle that has played out since Lucifer rebelled and fell from his place before YHVH. It is the heart of what Genesis 3:15 is telling us when YHVH says He will put enmity (war) between the seed of the woman (Y’shua) and the seed of the serpent (all who rebel against YHVH). Verse 7 also tells us that those who live by the Law of the *Sarx* cannot follow the Torah. My own thought here is that conversely, those who live by the Law of the Spirit will follow Torah.

We get even more context to what this is revealing by going back to chapter 7 of Romans. In verse 23 Paul tells us that there is a law in our body “warring against” the law in our mind. This is important to understand the idea of 2 different laws that we fall under and the dynamics at work between them. I submit to you that you can only have 2 choices about which law you live “under”. There is either the Law of the *Sarx* or the Law of the *Pneuma*, there is no third choice. They are diametrically opposed on each side of the battle of the ages and which side you choose, determines your eternal destiny.

It is important also to understand the Hebrew thought behind what YHVH’s Law or Torah means to them. In the interpretations rendered in English, most translators have given the idea of the law within legal terms which has negative connotations to most people. The old song “I Fought the Law and the Law Won” sums up how most people relate to this interpretation. Law is seen as something that comes against us and prevents us from living an enjoyable life. Law is something that causes us to have trouble.

The Hebrew mind sees law quite differently. They use education terms to describe what Torah means to them. It is instruction; it is a pathway that we walk on to get to our destination. Psalm 119:105 tells us that YHVH’s word (Torah) is a lamp unto our feet and a light upon our path. In Deuteronomy 30:15, 16 YHVH tells us that He sets a choice before us to follow His Torah and walk His pathway that leads to life and blessing or turn away from His Torah and walk our own pathway that leads to death and cursing. He makes it clear that it is our choice.

Y’shua taught the same thing when He described the 2 paths available for us in Matthew 7:13. Broad is the way that leads to destruction and many take that path. He tells us to

enter the straight and narrow gate to end up at eternal life. Y'shua is using the Hebrew understanding of Torah here. He is talking about pathways and this should not surprise us since He was a Son of Israel of the tribe of Judah. Y'shua did not teach anything that Torah did not teach. He only clarified. He stood up against the religious leaders of His day that had hijacked the Torah and bent it around their own interpretations. If you think about it, He would probably have to do the same in the majority of our churches today.

Torah teaches that there is enmity/war between those who follow His pathway and those who follow the pathway of rebellion, or their own pathway. In the time of the Judges in Israel, the Judges were brought forth because scripture records that "everyone was doing what seemed right in their own eyes". Does this sound familiar with today's crowd? Y'shua taught that there are only two paths to choose from both diametrically opposed. Paul taught that there is a war going on within us between the Law of the *Sarx* and the Law of the *Pneuma*. There is a thread of consistency throughout Scripture. Y'shua and Paul did not reinvent the Scriptures with the advent of the "New Testament" and bring forth any new doctrine. Torah did not get nailed to the Cross, unless you are talking about the body of Y'shua who is the Living Torah. Torah is the safe path laid out for us by YHVH from the beginning, and it has not changed.

I'm not sure how many of you have read the classic, "Pilgrim's Progress", but the main story line is that a man named Christian is on a journey to the Celestial City. There is a pathway that leads to the Celestial City and if he stays on the path, he will reach his destination. The path never changes throughout the story, yet Christian keeps getting into trouble because he keeps getting diverted off the path. This seems to be the problem in the church today. It has gotten diverted from the path. Today, the divorce rate, suicide rate, teen pregnancy rate, chemical abuse rate and many other indicators are statistically at a dead heat within the church compared to the world. The church is no longer the safe place to come for solutions to the world's problems. Highly placed pastors are being taken down by sexual issues or money issues. Many pastors have turned their pulpits into a political soap box. Things once thought unimaginable are now common practice within the church. Where will it end?

It's a good thing that YHVH does not change His path. In Malachi 3:6 YHVH says He does not change, otherwise we would be consumed. Every week most preachers will remind us that we can count on the promises of God because He is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow. I agree with that, but I'm sorry, you can't have it both ways. If He is the same, then His Torah is the same and the pathway continues to lead us correctly. If His Torah or pathway has changed, then He has changed and we can't depend on His promises. Once again, we must make a choice. Torah not only gives us a pathway to walk on, it is a description of the character of YHVH. It gives us character traits that He desires from those who desire to be in His presence. In other words, if we want to hang out with Him, this is the kind of people he wants to be with. If He doesn't change, why would His Torah change?

So where did the term "under the law" come from and what is meant by it? All references in my e-sword search to this phrase come from Paul's writings. Roman 6, for instance, reads:

- 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.
- 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.

- 13 Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.
- 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, **since you are not under law but under grace.**
- 15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!
- 16 Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?
- 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,
- 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Another popular text comes from Galatians 5:

- 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another.
- 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
- 15 But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.
- 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.
- 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.
- 18 But if you are led by the Spirit you **are not under the law.**

I have many people tell me I need to read Galatians when we are discussing Torah. I am quick to point out that we must really understand the context of what Paul is saying before we run around quoting catch phrases like "not under the law". Here the context of both Romans and Galatians is clearly setting the Law of the *Sarx* against the Law of the *Pneuma*. If we are lead by the Spirit, what path will we be walking on? Another area of confusion is that Paul routinely uses the term "law" when he is talking about the "oral law" that represents the teachings of the Pharisees, which is separate from Torah written by Moses. The context of what he writes informs us of which law he is talking about. Once again, the translators have not been kind to us with the words they have selected in many of the versions available to us today.

A good friend of mine, Dean Wheelock and his wife Susan have written extensively on this topic and I will not try to duplicate their excellent work. I will refer you to their booklet "Which Law" available for free from:

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Paul is usually referring to the "oral law", what today we know as the Talmud, Mishna and other sources of traditional thought that the Pharisees and others relied upon, and continue to rely upon, for guiding how they live their lives. One case in point is what Y'shua spoke against when he confronted the Pharisees over the issue of healing on the Shabbat. Torah does not prohibit healing on the Shabbat, yet over the years, the "oral

law” had developed to such a point that the Pharisees were certain that Y’shua was breaking the Shabbat and Torah by healing on the Shabbat.

Interestingly, we have a situation today within the traditional church that is quite similar. Today, a vast majority of the church has made Sunday their worship day, which is the first day of the week. Torah says we are to worship on the seventh day of the week, the Shabbat. The church teaches that Shabbat was changed to Sunday, yet there is not one scripture that verifies this. In the New Testament/ Brit Chadasha, Sunday or the first day of the week, is mentioned 8 times and each time, it is referred to as the day that follows Shabbat. Yet any pastor or priest will tell you that it was changed by the resurrection of Y’shua on Sunday morning although there is no scripture to support that idea. The Catholic Church even claims that they made the change and have the authority to do so since the Pope is the Vicar of Christ. Other people tell me they have their Shabbat on Sunday and it doesn’t matter which day of the week you use as long as you have a Shabbat. I wonder what YHVH thinks about that idea. The Hebrew word for describing the Shabbats is “moed” which means “appointed times”. YHVH is telling us that His calendar has this day filled in as an appointment to meet with us. If we come some other time, do you think He will meet with us? We wouldn’t get much business done in our everyday business world if we kept our calendars this way. A bank manager tells us he can meet us on Tuesday so we show up on Wednesday; do you think he will be available for us? It seems to me that a new “oral tradition” has replaced scripture today, and we find ourselves “teaching for doctrine the commandments of men”.

It is interesting to me that I hear many people tell me that “the Lord told them” to do this or that and yet what they tell me is often contrary to Torah. When I point this out, they tell me that they are not “under the law” anymore. They are free in the Spirit. I always have a question about this dynamic. It seems to me that everyone is “doing what seems right in their own eyes”. Judges 17:6, today. Since when is obeying YHVH the wrong thing to do? Since when is freedom given to us for license to do whatever we think we want to do regardless of what Scripture tells us? It seems that white is becoming black and black is becoming white today.

Actually, this should not surprise us. We have been told that this would happen. Y’shua said that a time would come when those who persecute the “set apart ones” would do so thinking they were doing God a service. I find it interesting that those who desire to obey YHVH and His Torah are being criticized more and more harshly and being marginalized as bigots for our firm stand on what Torah has declared to be unacceptable and racists for supporting Israel in their struggle to live in the land that YHVH promised to them in His covenant with Abraham.

I won’t go into this in detail, but only to say that I find it interesting that many denominations today are denouncing Israel and coming along side the Palestinians for a “Two State Solution” thinking this will solve the problems of the Middle East. Yet Scripture is full of references to what will happen to those that cause Israel to be divided and promises for full restoration of Israel in the land of promise. I believe that this misplaced loyalty to the “Roadmap to Peace” is a direct result of a church that believes

that Torah was nailed to the Cross, and God has changed His mind and the way He does things. Once we leave the standard of Torah, anything can happen over time because our compass has been tossed overboard and we have no more point of reference.

Actually YHVH prophesied in Torah that this would be the state of things at the end of the ages. In Deuteronomy 30 we read:

- 1 "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you,
- 2 and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you this day, with all your heart and with all your soul;
- 3 then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes, and have compassion upon you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.
- 4 If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will fetch you;
- 5 and the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, that you may possess it; and he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.
- 6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

YHVH tells us that the answer to this problem we are facing today is to return to Torah. The Hebrew word is “teshuva” which means to turn around and face YHVH and come back to His way of doing things. The English word usually used to translate teshuva is repent and its meaning has been cheapened over time to mean “to be sorry for a sin committed”. The Hebrew understanding is much more encompassing and involves a complete course change.

I would like to summarize by saying that we all have a choice to make today. We can either follow the broad pathway that most people are taking that leads to destruction, or we can follow the narrow path that leads to life everlasting. The broad way would have us believe that YHVH’s law has changed and we can do what ever seems right in our own eyes, or we can follow the narrow pathway which is prescribed by Torah, and that way has not changed since YHVH first gave it to us. Either way, we are making a choice to be under one or the other laws, the Law of the Sarx or the Law of the Pneuma. I am reminded of singer Bob Dylan’s song titled “You Got to Serve Somebody.” No matter which choice we make, we are “under” one or the other.

In Joshua 24:15 we are told “choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

The invitation is still the same today. We have a choice, either serve YHVH and follow His Torah/pathway or follow our own flesh/sarx—it’s up to us.