

TALKING TORAH TO OUR CHRISTIAN BRETHREN



And The Frustration Thereof

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The Written Torah is not a legalistic yoke of bondage. Properly understood, the Torah provides a moral guide for God's redeemed people, a set of instructions which teach us how to live. The commandments of the Torah are given to us by a loving Heavenly Father for our own good. Those of us who see the Torah this way find it a delight to keep the Sabbath and Feasts and other elements of the Torah that are rejected or neglected by most of the church world.

It can be frustrating trying to talk to Christians about the Torah. To us, it is as clear as day that followers of Jesus should keep the Sabbath and Torah. God certainly wanted His people to keep the Law before Christ came. Then when Christ came, *the very first thing He said about the Law* was this:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19).

Obviously Jesus was aware of the likelihood that some people would misunderstand His teachings, and erroneously conclude that He did away with the Old Testament Law by His coming. This stern warning to not even think such a thing is the very first thing the New Testament says about the Law. So why do so many Christians think that Jesus did away with the Law? Why don't they get it?

The inability of so many Christians to see the truth about the Torah is usually due to their being in one of two categories. I call these categories "The Ignorami" and "The Mis-Prefixed."

THE IGNORAMI

The Ignorami are Christians who are so ignorant of the Scriptures that they could be called Biblically illiterate. An ignoramus is not necessarily stupid or evil. Ignorant simply means "without knowledge." The Ignorami can be very good people and very intelligent. But when it comes to understanding the Torah, they just don't get it, because they are ignorant of what the Bible says about the Torah.

Lack of Torah knowledge can destroy God's people: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge... seeing thou hast forgotten the law [Torah] of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hos. 4:6).

The Apostle Paul indicated that a familiarity with the Torah is a prerequisite for understanding his teachings: "for I speak to them that know the law," he wrote (Rom. 7:1). The clear implication of Paul's statement is that a person who does *not* know the Law will not understand what Paul is writing.

Not only Paul's writings, but the entire New Testament, presupposes a familiarity with the Old Testament Scriptures. But The Ignorami are not familiar with the Old Testament. As a result, our Torah talk often goes over their heads. It just doesn't register. They hear the words we are saying, but they don't understand the point we are making. Our arguments fail to convince them, because they are not familiar with the Biblical texts we use to make our point. We may as well be speaking a foreign language to them.

If you have ever tried to learn a

foreign language well enough to understand native speakers speaking the language at their normal speed, you have some idea what it is like for The Ignorami when we talk Torah to them. A foreign language learner is limited in his vocabulary. He hears native speakers say words he has never before heard. Or he misunderstands the real meanings of some words. The foreign language learner is not accustomed to the normal speed and fluency with which the native speakers speak the language. As a result, the foreign language learner misses a lot of what is being said. Sometimes the things he misses are vital to the point that is being made by the native speaker.

When you talk Torah to one of The Ignorami, remember that he is Biblically illiterate, or nearly so. He is listening to you speak a foreign language. Because of his handicap, you must use what linguists call "Foreigner Talk." As a teacher of English as a foreign language, I learned to speak Foreigner Talk to my foreign students. Foreigner Talk is spoken slowly and clearly, with lots of pauses and no slurring together of words. It uses simple, common words, and avoids idioms. It is characterized by a lot of repetition and explanation and defining of terms. It is simplified English spoken as clearly as possible.

When I taught English as a foreign language, I found out that it requires a lot of patience on the part of the teacher. I would clearly explain some grammatical concept to the students, using Foreigner Talk. I would give several examples to demonstrate the concept. After a lot of explanation, I would ask the students, "Do you understand?" They would slowly, reluctantly nod their heads, but the glazed look on their eyes and the lack of smiles let me know that they really *didn't* yet understand. They were just nodding their heads to be polite. So I would explain again and give more examples.

I once told my wife, "I think that teaching English to foreign students must be a lot like teaching mentally retarded people." Some of my students were very intelligent people, but linguistically "retarded" when it came to

learning English. They were academic eggheads in their own native languages. One elderly couple showed me a Russian science textbook they had authored. Another Russian student had been a rocket scientist. Yet it was a tremendous struggle for these highly-intelligent people to learn English, because they were starting out as ignorami - people who were ignorant of the English language. In the same way, it is a tremendous struggle for some Christians to grasp the Torah, because they are so ignorant of the Scriptures.

THEMIS-PREFIXED

The Mis-Prefixed Christians are those who are familiar with the Bible, but whose experience with the Torah can be described by a series of words with the *mis-* prefix. These Christians have been misinformed, misled, misguided, and mistaught. As a result, they misread the Scriptures, misjudge, misconstrue, misunderstand, and misinterpret the Scriptures. Then they misuse the Scriptures to misteach and mislead others, who in turn pass on the same mistakes to yet others.

Like The Ignorami, The Mis-Prefixed Christians can be very good people and very intelligent. But unlike The Ignorami, they are very familiar with much of the Scriptures. Some of them know more Scripture than the average Torah-keeping Sabbatarian. They are Biblically literate and can carry on a coherent conversation about the Scriptures.

Their problem is that they have been taught wrongly about the Torah. They have been fed an anti-nomian view, and they have swallowed it and assimilated it into their thinking. As a result, the idea that followers of Jesus should keep Old Testament commandments seems unthinkable to them. And they have their proof-texts to support their anti-nomian position:

"We're not under the law," they say. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Christ is the end of the law. The law was added because of transgressions until the Seed should come. Sabbath? Romans 14. One man esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let every man be persuaded in his own mind. Colossians 2. Let no man judge you in regards to

meat, drink, holy days, or sabbaths. Galatians 4. Ye observe days, months, times, and years. I am afraid for you."

The problem with their proof-texts is that they are just that - proof- *texts*, but not proof of the validity of their anti-nomian position. The proof-texts are ripped out of their immediate Biblical context, then isolated and divorced from everything else the Bible says about the Torah. As the old saying goes, a text without a context is a pretext.

The Mis-Prefixed Christians' familiarity with the Scriptures actually works against them, because they have been programmed to interpret the Bible via their anti-nomian proof-texts. Thus, following the Torah is seen as a waste of time at best or as the enemy of grace at worst. Their anti-nomian view requires them to interpret every statement about the Law in a negative way. Even Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17-19 have to be interpreted to mean that He abolished the Law by fulfilling it - even though that's the very thing He says *not* to think!

These Christians are like foreign language learners who speak the language fluently, but whose speech is filled with errors. (Ruency just means that the speech flows smoothly and at a normal speed. Fluent speech is not necessarily error-free.) Perhaps you have heard non-native speakers of English whose speech is fluent but filled with errors. They mispronounce words, use words inappropriately, and make mistakes in grammar and sentence structure. But they are fluent! And they can understand each other perfectly, because they all speak English the same wrong way. They are like the Biblically-literate Christians who can discuss the Scriptures fluently, but whose view of the Torah is wrong. These Christians make perfect sense to each other, because they all learned the same wrong things about the Torah!

MAKING DISCIPLES OF THE IGNORAMI & OF THE MIS-PREFIXED
We are called to make disciples and teach them to observe all things whatsoever Yeshua commanded His first disciples. One of the very first things He commanded His disciples was to not even think He did away with the Torah.

Yeshua's teachings always honored the Torah. It should be obvious that He wants us to make Torah-honoring disciples, not disciples who neglect the Torah. How do we make The Ignorami and The Mis-Prefixed Christians into disciples who will honor the Torah and keep the commandments?

The remedy for ignorance is knowledge. Knowledge is the light that dispels the darkness of ignorance. The Ignorami need to be inspired and encouraged to study the Scriptures. "Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." This old saying applies spiritually as well as physically. I recently told my congregation, "The most valuable thing I can give you is not a good sermon or Bible teaching two or three times a week. The most valuable thing I can give you is to inspire you and persuade you to cultivate a life-long habit of studying the Bible for yourself."

If we can persuade The Ignorami to study the Scriptures, they will eventually become Biblically-literate enough to understand Torah talk. Then they can be programmed to see the Torah from a Biblical perspective, and the Bible from a pro-Torah perspective.

What about The Mis-Prefixed? They need to be de-programmed, then re-programmed. They must be lovingly yet firmly shown the errors in their thinking. Errors that come from misinterpretation, eisegesis, faulty translations, ignorance of history, poor hermeneutics, etc. need to be exposed. The proof-texts quoted by anti-nomians need to be put back into their context so it can be shown that these proof-texts prove nothing at all about the Torah's being abolished. Often when a proof-text is put back into its context, it can be shown that the proof-text actually supports a pro-Torah view rather than an anti-nomian view, as had formerly been supposed.

A foreign language teacher has to have great patience, whether he is teaching students who are ignorant of the target language or students who are fluent but filled with erroneous information about the target language. In the same way, we have to be patient when we talk Torah to The Ignorami or to The Mis-Prefixed Christians. Remember that they are our brothers and sisters.