

Things Christian Torah keepers must consider

1. *"The crowds were amazed at His teaching"* (Matt.7:28)

If Jesus was teaching the Torah, why were the crowds amazed at His teaching? They would not have been amazed if Jesus had been teaching the Torah, something they were all very familiar with, something taught by Rabbis in all of their synagogues. The Jewish system of religion was so widely practised in Israel that I suppose most people, even non-Jews, were familiar with it. To cause amazement Jesus must have spoken about things that they were not used to.

What Paul preached also stirred the Jews to anger to the point that they accused him of being *"a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world!"* (Acts 24:5). This would not have happened if Paul had given Jesus and the Torah the same status as proclaimed by the HRTI logo on their e-mail sent to me: *"Either you accept Torah and Y'shua (Jesus) or you reject both the Torah and Y'shua"*.

What upset the Jews must have been Paul's radical point of view concerning the Law which they esteemed so highly. He referred to it as *"those weak and miserable principles"* (Gal.4:9). Some would argue that Paul was not referring to Jewish law, but their argument carries no weight in the light of the fact that the central theme of his letter to the Galatians was to rebuke them for returning to their old ways of submitting to Jewish Law:

2. Did the apostles teach Gentile believers to observe the Law?

Why, when believers belonging to the party of the Pharisees insisted that Gentile converts must be circumcised and that they must keep the law, did the apostles, who were all Jews, not agree with them? (Acts 15:5). Instead of enforcing what the Pharisee believers wanted, they determined that the Gentile believers had to do four things only: abstain from food polluted by idols, not be involved in sexual immorality, not eat meat from strangled animals and not eat blood (Acts 15:20). If, for instance, the Sabbath, which was part of the Law, still had to be kept, would they not have included it in the list? Furthermore, in the letters to young Christian congregations, the apostles give guidance concerning every aspect of Christian living, like for example how husbands and wives must treat one another (Eph.5), what the attitude of parents and their children should be (Eph.6), how believers should handle material possessions (1 Cor.8 and 9), what must be done when someone is sick (James 5:14-16) and how believers should carry each other's burdens (Gal.6:2). Many other examples can be mentioned. Isn't it strange that when such a wide variety of issues are dealt with, some of seemingly minor importance, that if Sabbath keeping was such an important matter, no mention is made of it! This same argument can be applied to those who insist that tithes should be paid to the church.

We also read that the first converts devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42). These teachings were later included in the Epistles. We can still read them today. In these letters not a word of teaching appears in which believers are instructed to keep the Law of Moses!

3. What did the Father say through His Son?

Some people reason that Jesus was told by His Father that the Torah had to be kept. Here we want to emphasize that we do not question the fact that Jesus had heard from His Father, what we do question though, is the interpretation of what some people say what He heard from Him. A contextual study of what is written in the New Testament will show that Jesus received authority from the Father to instruct His disciples to obey, not the Torah, but what He taught them.

*"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**" (Matt.28:19-20, my emphasis).*

*"Therefore everyone who hears **these words of mine** (not the words of Moses) and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt.7:24, my emphasis). "These words" in the context refer to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.*

4. Do some keep the Torah for the wrong reasons?

Some believers think that because they keep the Torah, God will bless them. For which other reason will they want to do it? Those who think like this must be careful that they don't achieve the opposite, for the Word tells us *"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Gal.3:10).* Under the Law you cannot pick and choose which of the commandments you want to obey! Why do people keep the Sabbath, but ignore many other laws that also formed part of the Torah; laws like having to stone a rebellious son (**Deut.21:18-21**) and having to apply virginity tests to young women who want to get married? By the way, young women who failed the test had to be stoned! (**Deut. 22:20-21**). Do the women who are involved in the Hebrew Roots movement also follow the monthly purity laws as set out in **Lev.15:19**? More than six hundred other Old Testament laws, one as binding as the other, can be listed. If on the grounds of **Matt.5:17-18** it is reasoned that the Law is still in force and should be kept, everything in it must be obeyed, because through Moses God sternly warned concerning the Torah:

"See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it" (Deut.12:32).

Those who want to keep the Torah and its laws are also warned:

"If you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you..." (Deut.28:15).

Paul, in the New Testament, understanding the implications of Old Testament law-keeping, very clearly states that if someone wants to keep part of the Law, he is obligated to keep the whole of it (**Gal.5:3**). Against the background of these warnings we find that most Messianic Christians make themselves guilty of a highly selective form of law keeping.

5. Did Israel understand that only the Ten Commandments were to be kept?

Some people think that because only the Ten Commandments were written on two stone tablets, they are the only commandments that have to be kept. This is not what is taught in the Bible. We have already referred to the fact that God commanded the Israelites to follow **all** the commands and decrees that were given to them by Moses (**Deut.12:32**). Also Paul, realizing the danger of selective Old Testament law keeping, writes to the Galatians to warn them:

*"Cursed is everyone who does not continue **to do everything written in the Book of the Law**" (Gal.3:10, my emphasis).*

The Old Testament, also called the Law and the Prophets, must be seen as a whole and cannot be divided into separate sections. The Ten Commandments, as part of the whole of the Law and the Prophets, cannot be isolated and treated differently from everything else that is written in the Torah.

To say that the Ten Commandments is the only part of the Law that has to be kept by Christians is a serious misunderstanding of what is involved in the keeping of the Torah. The Law and the Prophets have to be treated as a unit and nobody has the right to make only certain parts of it applicable to Christians.

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