

Freedom and the Law:

Many Christians today seem to think that the Ten Commandments are legalistic and that to obey them is to follow the 'letter' of the Law that kills, rather than the 'spirit' of the Law that brings life.

Often, a number of passages in the letters of the Apostle Paul are used to try to justify this argument. An example is Romans 7:5-6 *"For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law, worked in our members to bring forth fruit to death. But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter."*

What I hope to clearly demonstrate is that the idea that the Ten Commandments are legalistic, and that obedience to them somehow brings death is a very false and damaging understanding.

While a much more complete answer to this question is detailed in Frank Selch's book 'Torah: Mosaic Law or Divine Instructions', I wish to give a brief rebuttal of this miss-understanding here. To properly address this issue though we need to be clear on the meaning of the terms 'freedom' and 'Law' as used in this context of the Ten Commandments (or 10 Words) as declared in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

Firstly, what is meant by 'freedom', at least amongst those who acknowledges the Creator, and agree that we are made in His image?

It certainly does not mean the freedom to do whatever we want without any constraints of any kind. That is, it does not mean being 'free' to murder others or steal or totally ignore the rights and freedoms of others. This would not be freedom but anarchy (a state of lawlessness). Incidentally, freedom from Torah would be '*Torahlessness*', a term which if used by the Apostle Paul would likely, and actually has been translated as '*Lawlessness*'!

When we recognize that 'Lawlessness' properly understood means 'Torahlessness', many of the uses of this term make much better sense, such as 2 Cor 6:14: *"... For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"*

To be 'Torahlessness' is to without the '*Divine Instructions*' (Torah) of the Almighty, which is clearly in opposition to being 'right' with God, that is living 'righteously'.

So let us look at what freedom meant to the Jewish people when they (and the world through them) were given the 10 Words. The Almighty states that he took them 'out of the house of bondage', that is, he released them from slavery.

Ex 20:2 *"I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."* Clearly, they had been freed from some 430 years in Egypt and generations of slavery, but what had they been freed to? The answer is in what the Almighty told Moses to say to Pharaoh.

He did not just say '*Let my people go*' but *"let My people go, and they will serve Me."* (Ex 7:26) So what were they free to do? **They were freed to serve God!** As creatures made in the image of God and with God as our ultimate Father, **true freedom only comes when we invite Him into our lives so that we may have a relationship with him.**

We can look at every thing and every person in this world as like the grass. Here one day and gone the next. Or like a flower which blooms for a moment and then dies. From this perspective our value could be seen as fleeting, and in the overall scheme of the vast universe, inconsequential.

But, to paraphrase Rabbi Moshe New: *"When we invite God into our lives, our lives become valuable."*

If your primary school child brings home a drawing to show you, you see it as most valuable even though it would be worth nothing on Ebay for example. Its value derives from the fact that someone you love has brought it to you to share. The Almighty has given you many gifts – if you love Him then those gifts are of great value. Conversely, as your Father, he views anything you bring Him to be of great value because he loves you (even if the world does not see value in it).

In the same way that every good and beautiful thing your young child does is of great value to you; every good and beautiful thing you do now (when you are in a relationship with your Father in Heaven), is of great value to Him!

So, we can see that God, in releasing the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, has some purpose in mind, which included that they be invited into a relationship with Him and serve Him. We see at Sinai prior to the giving of the 10 Words that the people accepted the invitation from God:

Ex 19: 3- 8 "The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

*So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, **All that the LORD has spoken we will do.**"*

Now that they have accepted the invitation and the (Abrahamic) covenantal relationship¹, how does the loving Father protect and guide these people, who only days before had been slaves and had had very little control over their comings and goings; their choices and daily decisions?

He gives them the moral code of the Universe²; He gives them both principles to guide their accountability toward their Creator and Covenant Maker and principles to guide their responsibilities towards their brothers and sisters and neighbours.

Before we go any further in discussing the 10 Words and the rest of the commandments given in the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh), we need to consider what is meant by the word 'Law' and if this is a fair translation of the Hebrew word(s) used to describe the commandments given on the 2 tablets of stone at Sinai.

The word 'law' in most modern English translations is a translation of the Greek word '*nomos*' which does indeed mean rules, ordinances or decrees that need to be followed. The Greek translators used '*nomos*' whenever they saw the Hebrew word 'Torah'.

Some partial quotes from Frank Selch's book '*Torah: Mosaic Law or Divine Instructions*':

"Rooted in religion, the term Nomos always retains its relation to the cults in the Greek world. Even written law expresses the will of deity and in general terms, Nomos is seen as 'the will of the gods'— the law of the cosmos. What is important for the Greeks is not the subjective moral sense, but objective knowledge of right from wrong— gnosis. ..."

It is most interesting to note, that the classical Hebrew does not have a word for Law or Religion. There are commandments, precepts and ordinances, but no law as understood by the Greeks (Gentiles). ..."

Frank goes on to make the point that the Hebrew word 'Torah' (translated 'law') actually means instructions, and normally in the Biblical context, it means 'divine instructions'. This alone puts a very different slant on its implications.

Today, just to add to the confusion though, Jewish people when using the word Torah, may be referring to the Ten Commandments, or to the 5 books of Moses or even to the whole of the Tanakh (OT). They also refer to the Talmud as the 'Oral Torah'.

Returning to the revelation of the 10 Words on Mt Sinai, we see the Almighty giving His Covenant People (Israel), instructions to guide them, to protect them and to act as a boundary fence within which they can be truly free, which includes freedom from fear. By giving them one tablet that detailed how to relate to authority, that is, five rules of accountability to the Almighty and His representatives; and one tablet that detailed how to relate to one another, that is, their responsibilities in social circumstances, God gave them a master blueprint for righteous living.

The 10 Words then are like a boundary fence to protect them. Imagine you have just purchased a house that fronts on to a busy road and you have some very young children. If you have no fence around your front yard, you would not want your children to play there because of the danger of straying onto the road and being hurt. If you erect a good fence around the front yard, then you and your children can feel safe, secure and free to enjoy the space that is your front yard. The fence then is not really restricting their freedom, but giving it safe boundaries.

There are a number of real-life examples we can turn to which demonstrate that freedom without restriction or at least, without supportive procedures and policies can be unhelpful and unsuccessful.

¹ See 'Righteousness Before Messiah' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Righteousness%20before%20Messiah.pdf>

² For details on how the Ten Commandments are the Moral Code of the Universe, see Frank Selch's book '*Torah: Mosaic Law or Divine Instructions*'

For example the freedom of the slaves in the Southern States of America around 1865 was not well planned and well supported. While it was a most significant step forward for humanity generally, and for the black African slaves in particular, the evidence that it was not as successful as it should have been is clearly seen in that some 100 years later the civil rights marches were still needed. In these marches in the 1960's the African Americans fought for the political, economic and social equality that had long been denied them.

Passover and Freedom

Sometimes, perhaps too often, Christians are guilty of using allegory too much when reading the TaNaK (OT). Christians see many examples of 'shadows and types', which, while often very valid, can lead to even greater truths being hidden and remaining unseen and therefore not engaged with and enriched by.

There are a great many 'shadows and types' or allegory in the Passover story. The Apostle Paul spoke of Yeshua as 'Our Passover Lamb' when he called upon followers of Yeshua to celebrate Passover. The Passover meal was clearly very important to Yeshua when he called his followers to remember him as they yearly partook of this memorial. We can see a great many 'shadows and types' in the whole exodus tale (please see my article [Our Passover Lamb](http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/Our%20Passover%20Lamb%20apr09.pdf) for some of these - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/Our%20Passover%20Lamb%20apr09.pdf>).

However, there is a very important message for all people in the Passover story. It is not just a message of the grace of the Almighty in bringing the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt; it is not just a message of freedom to be whatever we want to be; but freedom to serve the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Passover commemorates the end of Jewish slavery and suffering. It is a yearly reminder that God is aware of the suffering of innocents and desires to bring good news to the poor; heal the broken-hearted and give freedom to the oppressed.

But God's grace; His offer of freedom is always in harmony with all his attributes such as his justice. Families and societies experience the truth that freedom without boundaries fails.

Freedom without boundaries, without consequences, without rules, leads to anarchy, to injustice and to suffering. Whether it is the pain and grief we feel when our children use their freedom to swear and speak disrespectfully to others, or where societal freedoms lead to risks to the security and well-being of others from bullying resulting in suicide, to the freedom of hate speech and incitement resulting in acts of terrorism.

Societies quickly learn that no one can be totally free at the expense of other people's rights. The misuse or abuse of freedom can often have very sad and tragic consequences.

So when we consider the Festival of Passover, we also recognize that the freedom experienced when the Israelites travelled for three days from slavery in Egypt and passed through the Red Sea, they were only a part of the way on their journey. This journey continued on to receiving the 'divine instructions' (Torah) at Mt Sinai that would give them the boundaries and principles for how to be properly free, that is, to be truly free by knowing the moral code that guides and empowers a responsible life of freedom.

The Jewish people were freed from physical slavery in order to voluntarily place themselves under the restrictions of moral integrity. As Rabbi Benjamin Blech states in 'Freedom without limits': "*Freedom without any restraints may very well be just as destructive as slavery. "No one can ever tell me what to do" – an idea not limited by ethical constraints – is potentially just as much a threat to the social order as slave masters...*". This is what Abraham Lincoln understood so well in his famous words, "Freedom is not the right to do what we want, but what we ought."³

All those who profess to follow Yeshua as Messiah, should also participate with Israel in this very important festival⁴.

Returning to Paul:

So now when we return to the writings of the Apostle Paul, a man who remained an orthodox Jew, even after his encounter on the road to Damascus, and who at the end of his life repeated his allegiance to his Jewish heritage; to Torah and even it seems to 'Oral Torah' when he declared: "*Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, ...*" (Acts 28:17).

So we may now be ready to appreciate that the Apostle Paul would not have spoken against Torah as Torah meant freedom and Torah enabled righteousness⁵. So Paul would never have told his readers that followers of Messiah Yeshua

³ Rabbi Benjamin Blech: 'Freedom without limits' at http://www.aish.com/h/pes/t/f/Freedom_Without_Limits.html

⁴ See 'Col 2:16 & the Sabbath' for more on this aspect - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Col%202%20and%20the%20Sabbath.pdf>

⁵ See my article 'The Apostle Paul: disciple or fraud' at http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/TheApostlePaul_disciple_or_fraud.pdf

are dead to Divine Instruction. Instead when Paul refers to being 'dead to law', he can only be speaking of man's law, not God's Torah.

The 10 Words contain enormous truth; and the deepest wisdom. They were referred to many times by both Yeshua and Paul as the bedrock of true faith; they are summarized in what Yeshua declared the two greatest commandments and when the Apostle Paul quotes Lev 19:18 and states that: *"For the whole Torah is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (Gal 5:14).

Consider, for example the 2nd Word; the commandment to avoid idolatry.

Psalm 128:1-2: *Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed (happy), and it shall be well with you.*" and Ps 97:11 *Light is sown for the righteous, And gladness for the upright in heart.*"

These Psalms inform us that God is the ultimate source of meaning and therefore happiness. If we seek God we will find happiness; if we seek the worship of idols we will move away from God.

What is the consequence of idolatry? *"The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them!"* Psalms 135:15-18 (ESV).

That is, the more we lead idolatrous lives the more we become blind and deaf and dead to God!

What about those who believe they are free from the (freedom of the)10 Words? Perhaps a denial of such vital truth also leads to blindness. The Apostle Paul warns that a refusal to love the truth can lead to very serious consequences including God-sent delusion and hence blindness (2 Thess 2).

Recognition and acknowledgment of the Moral Code of the Universe, the Ten Commandments or 10 Words is as vital to our well being as recognition and acknowledgment of the Laws of Physics, such as the Law of Gravity.

In Romans 7:12-14 the Apostle Paul writes: *"So the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. ... For we know that the Torah is spiritual"*

The 'letter of the Law' is not obedience to the Torah and the 10 Words, but the legalistic adherence to the man-made laws, to layers of rules and regulations added by men.

The Jewish people were not saved through the giving of the 10 Words; they have already been 'saved' by God's grace out of bondage in Egypt. Obedience to Torah did not save the Jewish people.

Rather, obeying the 10 Words, with a circumcised heart as called for by Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, King David, Yeshua and the Apostle Paul⁶, while an act of true repentance; is a natural result of salvation, not a requirement for salvation.

Just as our Messiah learned obedience (Heb 5:8), we too, once we receive his saving grace, are also called to learn obedience⁷.

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www.circumcisedheart.info

⁶ See 'Righteousness Before Messiah' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Righteousness%20before%20Messiah.pdf>

⁷ Some passages that call for obedience to Torah: Ps 1:1-2, Ps 119:1, 2 John 6, 1 John 2:3-5.