

The Heresy of the One Law Movement

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Delivered to Ohev Yisrael January 21, 2017

We who affiliate with Ohev Yisrael acknowledge that we are participants in, and integrally a part of the Messianic Jewish movement. But I want to speak with you today about another movement – an heretical movement – that has subversively infiltrated and threatened the very foundation of Messianic Judaism. The movement of which I am speaking most often goes by the name “One Law,” and it teaches that when a Gentile comes to faith in Yeshua, he or she takes on the same obligation to the *Torah* (some would say the Mosaic Law) as do believers who are Jewish.

Now that does not seem so bad even if it were true, so why am I characterizing the one law movement as heretical and dangerous? Put succinctly, it blurs the distinction between Jews and Gentiles and therefore frustrates God’s plan for human redemption whereby He chose the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be a priestly people to bring knowledge of Him to the Gentile nations of the world. Why He decided to redeem mankind this way I do not know, but in Exodus 19:5-6 we read:

“Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim [priests] for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”

And in Isaiah 49:3-6 we read:

“He said to me, “You are my servant, Isra’el, through whom I will show my glory.” But I said, “I have toiled in vain, spent my strength for nothing, futility.” Yet my cause is with ADONAI, my reward is with my God. So now ADONAI says- he formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Ya’akov back to him, to have Isra’el gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the sight of ADONAI, my God having become my strength- he has said, “It is not enough that you are merely my servant to raise up the tribes of Ya’akov and restore the offspring of Isra’el. I will also make you a light to the nations, so my salvation can spread to the ends of the earth.””

Messianic Judaism, as distinct from modern Christianity, is based upon the premise that Jews who come to believe in Messiah Yeshua remain Jews, and have an important reason within God’s plan for human redemption for doing so. That was the original understanding of the earliest Christians – the first-century Gentiles that came to faith in Yeshua through the Gospel teachings of Jewish believers. These Gentiles, though they affiliated with Jews, did not consider themselves as having become Jews and the Jews who came to believe in Yeshua did not think that they had stopped being Jews and had become Gentiles. There was, however some confusion at first, as to what God required of these new Gentile believers for salvation vis-à-vis their adherence to the Mosaic Law. After all, up to then it was assumed by the Jewish community that

only Jews and related Gentiles that sought to obey the *Torah* and repent through the animal sacrifices in the Temple were saved. So, there were a group of well-meaning Jews (whom we now call “Judaizers”), who went around telling the new Gentile believers that in order to be saved they had to be circumcised and obey all the commandments of the *Torah* along with, and in the same manner, as Jews. This clearly presented an obstacle for Gentiles that were willing to receive Yeshua, but that were not desirous of being circumcised.

In order to decide the matter, Jewish emissaries and elders of the Messianic community assembled in Jerusalem and, after prayer and debate, concluded that the following letter should be sent to the believing Gentiles; I will read a portion of it from Acts 2:24-29 as follows:

“We have heard that some people went out from among us without our authorization, and that they have upset you with their talk, unsettling your minds. So we have decided unanimously to select men and send them to you with our dear friends Bar-Nabba and Sha’ul, who have dedicated their lives to upholding the name of our Lord, Yeshua the Messiah. So we have sent Y’hudah and Sila, and they will confirm in person what we are writing. For it seemed good to the Ruach HaKodesh and to us not to lay any heavier burden on you than the following requirements: to abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will be doing the right thing. Shalom!”

And so, the Gentiles were exempted from many aspects of the Mosaic Law, including circumcision, AS WERE THEIR JEWISH BROTHERS WHO HAD COME TO BELIEVE IN YESHUA! Is what I just said correct? No, it most certainly is not! Where in Scripture do we read that Jews who became believers in Yeshua were released from the obligations of the Mosaic Law along with their Gentile brothers? We don’t read it because it is not there! From the inception of Messianic Judaism in the First Century, Gentile and Jewish believers, though saved in the same way through faith in Yeshua, nevertheless maintained different obligations of obedience to the Mosaic Law. The Jewish believers continued in their obligation to keep all of the commandments of *Torah* (which they could do because the Temple and the Levitical priesthood was still intact), whereas the Gentiles were only required to keep a subset of them. And, with adjustments necessarily made because today we are no longer under the Mosaic Covenant, different obligations by Jews and Gentiles to the *Torah* still exist.

Because I know how some of us have been taught, I am anticipating that right about now, the blood pressure of several of you has risen to a dangerous level because you heard me say that we are no longer under the Mosaic Covenant. Well, we are not, and I will risk a brief departure from the subject of this message to explain why. Actually, it needs very little explanation because the Scriptures on it are so precise. Consider, for example, Jeremiah 31:30(31)-31(30) that says:

“Here, the days are coming,” says ADONAI, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI.”

Jeremiah prophesied that there would one day be a New Covenant that would not be like the Mosaic Covenant, and that the reason for it was that the Israelites had violated (i.e. broke) the Covenant that God had initially given them. Now anyone who has ever taken a course on contracts knows that when a party to a covenant breaks it, the innocent party (in this case God) has the option of declaring the covenant terminated. Well, God did decide to end the Mosaic Covenant, but to phase it out rather than end it all at once. That is why we read in Hebrews 8:13:

“By using the term, “new,” he has made the first covenant “old”; and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether.”

Have you grasped what I just read? Approximately two-thousand years ago, the writer of the Book of Hebrews (whom we assume is Paul) said that, even then, the Mosaic Covenant was on its way to vanishing. So, you can argue over whether it is entirely gone today, but there are three things that are clear: (1) That we are solidly in the New Covenant that Jeremiah prophesied would be different than the Old one; (2) That the Mosaic Covenant is either severely diminished or is already completely gone; and (3) Regardless of which it is, most of what was required by the Old (or Mosaic) Covenant can no longer be complied with today by either Jews or Gentiles because so much of it relied on the Temple sacrifices, the Levitical Priesthood, and the theocracy of Israel.

Now, getting back to our main subject the “One Law Movement,” where does this teaching that Gentiles are equally responsible as Jews to keep the *Torah* come from? Mainly from three Scriptures, the first one being Exodus 12:49 that says:

“The same teaching [Torah or Law] is to apply equally to the citizen and to the foreigner living among you.”

Reasonably re-interpreted, it is saying that *Torah* applies equally to the Jew and the non-Jew. The second Scripture is Leviticus 24:22 that says:

“You are to apply the same standard of judgment to the foreigner as to the citizen, because I am ADONAI your God.”

Re-interpreted, it too says that *Torah* applies equally to the Jew and to the non-Jew. The third Scripture is Numbers 15:16, which says:

“The same Torah and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the foreigner living with you.”

Re-interpreted, it is the same as the two before it – that *Torah* applies equally to the Jew and to the non-Jew.

On first inspection, it is overwhelming that that is what these Scriptures seem to say. But, when we look at the contexts in which each of them are found, we come away with an entirely

different picture. For example, the real meaning of Exodus 12:49 is revealed when we add verse 48 to it, and then it reads:

"If a foreigner staying with you wants to observe ADONAI's Pesach, all his males must be circumcised. Then he may take part and observe it; he will be like a citizen of the land. But no uncircumcised person is to eat it. The same teaching is to apply equally to the citizen and to the foreigner living among you."

We see now that the application of Exodus 12:49 is very limited, in that it is only referring to a situation in which a Gentile that is staying with a Jew wants to observe Passover. Similarly, the meaning of Leviticus 24:22 is made clear when we add to it verse 21. With the added verse it now reads:

"He who kills an animal is to make restitution, but he who kills another person is to be put to death. You are to apply the same standard of judgment to the foreigner as to the citizen, because I am ADONAI your God."

Here too we see that the application of the Scripture (in this case Leviticus 24:22) is exceedingly limited in that it is only referring to matters of criminal and civil justice. Lastly, the real meaning of Numbers 15:16 is made clear when we add to it verses 14 and 15, and it then reads:

"If a foreigner stays with you- or whoever may be with you, through all your generations- and he wants to bring an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for ADONAI, he is to do the same as you. For this community there will be the same law for you as for the foreigner living with you; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations; the foreigner is to be treated the same way before ADONAI as yourselves. The same Torah and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the foreigner living with you."

With the additional verses added, we see that the application of this Scripture is only meant to apply to a situation in which a Gentile who is staying with a Jew wants to bring an offering made by fire to the Tabernacle (later the Temple) for Adonai. So, what has happened to the “one law for Jew and Gentile” doctrine that was based principally on these three Scriptures that were taken out of context? It is no longer defensible.

Now, there is a right way to say that there is only one *Torah* for everyone, and that is to concede that within every code of law, individual statutes often apply differently to different people. So, for example, in the U.S. Code, there is a statute known as the “American with Disabilities Act” that provides certain benefits for disabled persons that are not provided for persons who are not disabled. We may not be disabled, but we are subject to the law just as everyone else in the United States; it is one law for all.

I’ll give another example. We who are meeting here are all subject to the Code of Virginia; in other words, the Code of Virginia is one body of law for all of us. Now, within the Code of Virginia, there is a statute (§ 1-204) that states:

“For the purposes of all laws of the Commonwealth including common law, case law, and the acts of the General Assembly, unless an exception is specifically provided in this Code, a person shall be an adult, shall be of full age, and shall reach the age of majority when he becomes 18 years of age.”

The purpose of this statute is to distinguish between an adult and a child because adults are held to certain standards under the law that children are not. Adults can drink alcohol, purchase tobacco products, serve in the Virginia National Guard, enter into contracts, purchase firearms, marry without their parents' consent, and so forth. Children can do none of those things and yet the statute is one law for all.

It is the same with the *Torah*. It is one body of law for all, but the individual statutes of the *Torah* apply differently to different persons according to each person's status or identity.

Commandments regarding *niddah* (purity) apply differently to women than to men.

Commandments that give parents responsibility to teach their children apply differently to parents and to children. Commandments that prescribe the duties of *Cohanim* apply differently to *Cohanim* than to ordinary Israelites. All of these differences, and yet the *Torah* is one law for all.

And it is the same for Jews and Gentiles. The *Torah* is one law for both, but it applies differently to each. Let me give you some examples:

First, the requirement of covenant circumcision; in Leviticus 12:1-3 we read:

“ADONAI said to Moshe, ‘Tell the people of Isra’el: ‘If a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she will be unclean for seven days with the same uncleanness as in niddah, when she is having her menstrual period. On the eighth day, the baby’s foreskin is to be circumcised.’”

B’rit Milah (covenant circumcision) is commanded for all Jewish males and for Gentiles in only special circumstances. Although it is not prohibited for a Gentile to be circumcised it is not required either, and it will have no effect regarding a Gentile's covenant identity. This illustrates a different application of *Torah* for the Jew and the Gentile. Same law, but a different application.

Next, let's consider the commandment regarding redemption of the firstborn son. In Exodus 13:11-13 we read:

“When ADONAI brings you into the land of the Kena’ani, as he swore to you and your ancestors, and gives it to you, you are to set apart for ADONAI everything that is first from the womb. Every firstborn male animal will belong to ADONAI. Every firstborn from a donkey, you are to redeem with a lamb; but if you choose not to redeem it, you must break its neck. But from people, you are to redeem every firstborn son.”

The redemption of the firstborn son referred to in Exodus 13:13 is redemption from priestly service in the Tabernacle. In its biblical context it applies only to the firstborn sons of Israelites who are not from the tribe of Levi, and it is ceremonially performed today in what is known as the *Pidyon HaBen*. I suppose that conducting a *Pidyon HaBen* ceremony in the case of a Gentile

child is not prohibited, but it has no biblical meaning. Once again, a different application of *Torah* for the Jew and for the Gentile.

Now here is what I consider the quintessential example of the *Torah* applying differently to the Jew and the Gentile. First its application to the Jew, from Exodus 31:13-14:

"Tell the people of Isra'el, 'You are to observe my Shabbats; for this is a sign between me and you through all your generations; so that you will know that I am ADONAI, who sets you apart for me. Therefore you are to keep my Shabbat, because it is set apart for you. Everyone who treats it as ordinary must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it is to be cut off from his people."

So, according to the commandment of *Torah*, Jews that do not keep the Sabbath are to be put to death. Now let's look at God's attitude regarding Gentiles and the Sabbath: We read from Isaiah 56:4-7:

"For here is what ADONAI says: 'As for the eunuchs [i.e. emasculated Gentiles]who keep my Shabbats, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant: in my house, within my walls, I will give them power and a name greater than sons and daughters; I will give him an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to ADONAI to serve him, to love the name of ADONAI, and to be his workers, all who keep Shabbat and do not profane it, and hold fast to my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

It is clear from this Scripture that Gentiles who do not keep God's Sabbaths are not punished, and those that do are rewarded. So yes, God wants Gentiles to keep the Sabbath but they are not punished for not doing so, showing an indisputable difference in how *Torah* applies to Gentiles in comparison to how it applies to Jews.

It is time for me to stop now, but because many of you here are Gentile believers that have been drawn here by the Lord to serve Him in this Messianic Jewish community, I say this: If God has put you here, it is for the purpose of your coming alongside your Messianic Jewish brethren and assisting them in fulfilling their covenantal responsibilities. Tikkun refers to Gentiles such as yourselves as *K'rovei Yisrael* (or close family member of Israel) and for you, it makes eminently good sense that you take upon yourselves the same *Torah*-observant lifestyle and responsibilities as that of your Jewish brothers. As for the Gentiles that attend here who are not *K'rovei Yisrael*, know for certain that you are loved and appreciated, and that you have liberty regarding *Torah* observance that you will not be criticized for embracing.