

Is God's Law "Sin and Death?" (Romans 8:1-8)

by Moshe Schwab

The Bible says God's law is "right and good" (Deuteronomy 6:18), but some say it is not. Someone is lying. In fact, God's commandments give us wisdom and understanding beyond what any nation can give us.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 NKJV says:

Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for **this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'** "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?

Let's look at Romans 8 in context. It talks about the flesh. What is the flesh? That must be something done by man. So, the context is about fleshy laws and not God's good commandments. Shaul quotes Deuteronomy in Galatians 3:10. Deuteronomy 27:26 NKJV says, "Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them." Why did he need to say this? It is because some were following fleshy man-made laws instead of God's laws. It says in Deuteronomy 4:2 NKJV, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."

Some laws we can properly apply to other things and we should do that. For example, the Bible tells us to return someone's lost ox. Deuteronomy 22:1 NKJV says, "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your brother." An ox could be important to someone in that society for planting. In the same way, we should always try to return something that another person has lost.

Shaul quotes the Old Testament portion frequently and uses it to teach important applications of the Torah. He uses the Old Testament portion and compares leaders to oxen and says they need to be supported for their work. 1 Timothy 5:18 NKJV, "For the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" Just making extra misapplied man-made laws is wrong though. They had thousands of extra laws in Yeshua's time and some of them contradicted the Torah (God's instructions); some wrongly micromanaged life.

The 1,050 or so New Testament portion commands come from proper applications of the Torah. For example, Leviticus 19:18 NKJV tells us to forgive and love others: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Shaul says something similar in Ephesians 4:32 NKJV: "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another."

What is the Spirit that Shaul is talking about in Romans 8? Yeshua said in John 14:15-17 NKJV, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth." The Holy Spirit is our helper to follow God. The first helper ("keep my commandments") is God's laws in the Torah. The other helper is the Holy Spirit.

Now let's look at Romans 8:1-8 NKJV. The brackets are my comments:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

[Those who live with the help of the Holy Spirit are not under a verdict because they are not living according to man-made things. (They are not making up misapplied man-made laws.)]

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."

[Instead of man-made laws, the Holy Spirit has freed us from the curse of not following God correctly.]

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

[The extra man-made laws are weak because they are man-made. Instead of living by fleshy man-made laws, we can do what is right with the help of the Holy Spirit.]

"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, the things of the Spirit."

[Those who live by fleshy man-made laws have their minds on these fleshy laws. Those who live by the Holy Spirit are following the Torah with the help of the Holy Spirit.]

"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God." [The fleshy mind is cursed because it is not following the Torah ("not subject to the law of God"). They cannot please God through these fleshy man-made laws.]

As we can see, Shaul tells us that we need the Holy Spirit help to follow God's commands. We need to understand that making up man-made laws to help us produces laws that can be against God's commandments. Micromanaging life is also against God's commandment in Deuteronomy 4:2.

Yeshua said about those who follow these man-made laws, "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men;" Matthew 15:9 NKJV. Isaiah said, "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men." Isaiah 29:13 NKJV. Shaul was following the teachings of the Old Testament and Messiah Yeshua. He taught the same thing that Yeshua taught.