

Just what is “legalism?”

You often hear the term “legalist” applied to someone who believes in obeying Yahweh's Commandments as written in the Torah. It is basically defined as “ any doctrine which states salvation comes strictly from adherence to the law.” (Wikipedia)

Let's define a few terms before we continue.

The word translated “law” in the New Testament scriptures comes from the Greek word “nomos”. Strong's Concordance defines it for us as follows:

G3551

νόμος

nomos

nom'-os

From a primary word **νέμω** nemō (to *parcel* out, especially *food* or *grazing* to animals); **law** (through the idea of prescriptive *usage*), generally (*regulation*), **specifically (of Moses [including the volume]; also of the Gospel), or figuratively (a principle): - law.**

We can verify this is true by looking at a direct “New Testament” quote of an “Old Testament” verse.

Heb 8:10 *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith YHWH; I will put my **laws** into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them Elohim, and they shall be to me a people:*

A quick check of Strong's Concordance will show that the word above translated “law” is indeed the Greek word “nomos”. Now compare it to the corresponding verse from the “Old Testament”:

Jer 31:33 *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith YHWH, I will put my **law** in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their Elohim, and they shall be my people.*

The word translated “law” in the above verse is the Hebrew word “Torah”.

H8451

תורה

tôrâh tôrâh

to-raw', to-raw'

From H3384; a *precept* or *statute*, especially the *Decalogue* or *Pentateuch*: - law.

Therefore, we can conclude that the Greek word “nomos” translated as “law” in the “New Testament” is equivalent to the word “Torah” in the “Old Testament”.

We are told in 1 John 3:4 that sin is defined as the breaking of the law (Torah).

1Jo 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

Again, we can refer to our Strong's Concordance to verify that the word translated "law" above it the Greek word "nomos".

The same Greek word "nomos" prefixed by the letter "A" (anomos) means "lawless". A similar word "anomia" therefore means "lawlessness". We find several examples of this word translated in the New Testament.

Mat 7:21 *Not every one that saith unto me, My master, my master, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

Mat 7:22 *Many will say to me in that day, My master, my master, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*

Mat 7:23 *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

Once again referring to Strong's Concordance, we find the word translated "iniquity" above is the Greek word "anomia" which we defined above as "lawlessness". Since we have also seen that the law that is being referred to is the Torah, then we see that the real meaning of "iniquity" is the breaking of the Torah. So a worker of "iniquity" would be one who is "Torahless".

The Mystery of Iniquity of 2 Thess 2:7 would therefore refer to the "Mystery of Torahlessness".

If obedience to Torah is legalism, then Yahshua was the greatest legalist of all time. He never broke even one of Yahweh's Commandments. He never condemned anyone for keeping Yahweh's Commandments, but he did condemn those who had substituted mans laws for Yahweh's laws. The Pharisees had elevated their oral traditions above Yahweh's laws. The Pharisees were very legalistic in their beliefs that a person had to keep the Jewish oral traditions they themselves had written in order to be saved.

Another often heard expression that is akin to "Legalism" is the phrase "to be under the law". This is an often misunderstood statement which has been interpreted as "the act of keeping the law" (Torah). But, actually the term means that one is relying upon the keeping of the Torah for his personal salvation. There has only been one person who was ever able to do it, our Messiah Yahshua. But, when one rejects the free gift of Yahshua, the Messiah, they automatically return to once again being "under the law" to try to earn salvation by their own efforts. However, salvation has always been by the grace of Yahweh and not by any works we have done. Still, that still does not negate the need to keep Yahweh's Commandments. We are told numerous times in scripture to keep the commandments of Yahweh. Failure to do so was the reason Israel was scattered into the nations. It was one of the last things we were told to do in the last chapter of the Old Testament book of Malachi.

Mal 4:1 *For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith YHWH of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.*

Mal 4:2 *But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

Mal 4:3 *And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in*

the day that I shall do this, saith YHWH of hosts.

Mal 4:4 ***Remember ye the law of Moses*** my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you EliYah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of YHWH:

Mal 4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. .

I listed all 6 verses for context. Verse 1 is referring to the Day of Yahweh which is still future. In verse 4 we are told to remember the law (Torah) of Moses. One of the first things Yahshua taught in his sermon on the mount, was to think not that he had come to destroy the Torah or the prophets.

Mat 5:17 ***Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.***

Mat 5:18 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.***

Mat 5:19 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.

Yahshua had a reason for referring to the passing of heaven and earth here. He was reminding them that Moses had invoked “heaven and earth” as witness against Israel what would happen to them if they forsook the Torah. They would be scattered into the nations. This can be found in Deut 4, 30 and 31. So as long as heaven and earth stood as a witness, the Torah would remain in effect.

We are told to follow Yahshua and keep his commandments. His commandments are the same as His Father's. Paul told us to follow him as he followed Messiah. We are to live our lives as Yahshua lived his. Yahshua kept the Torah and all of the Commandments which included the keeping of the Sabbath and using the true name of His Father. He manifested Yahweh's name, not some title, to his disciples. How can we follow Yahshua and do not the things he said? He said in John:

Joh 14:15 ***If ye love me, keep my commandments.***

1Jo 2:3 And hereby ***we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.***

1Jo 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1Jo 2:5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of YHWH perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

1Jo 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself ***also so to walk, even as he walked.***

Now, it may be a little easier to understand what Paul meant when he said:

Rom 3:19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before YHWH.

Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Those who are “under the law” are relying upon the keeping of the law for salvation. By the works of the law (their own efforts), there shall be no flesh justified. A person cannot rely upon keeping the law for salvation. And the last verse confirms 1 John 3:4 that the law tells us what sin is and that by breaking it, we commit sin.

Rom 5:13 *(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*

This is because the very definition of sin is the breaking of the law or Torah. If there is no Torah to break, we cannot have sin imputed to us. However, we know that we do sin. So this means that the Torah is still in effect and Yahshua came because it was. He came to forgive us of our Torah breaking. If the Torah was done away with Yahshua, then why did he die? No Torah breaking, no sin! The answer is obvious. He came because he is the embodiment of the Torah and it remains in effect forever.

There are a couple more verses I'd like to look at here. Notice that the Saints do **two** things here.

Rev 12:17 *And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of YHWH, **and** have the testimony of Yahushua the Messiah.*

Rev 14:12 *Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of YHWH, and the faith of Yahushua.*

Rev 22:14 *Blessed are **they that do his commandments,** that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

Do you think it is possible that the false accusation of being legalistic, a word that is not found in scripture, might keep many who say they love Yahshua from the kingdom because they have been duped into thinking obedience to the word wasn't necessary? This means they continued to sin and did not repent of their Torah breaking. Repentance of our sins is necessary for forgiveness. We have to know we sinned. If we don't realize that the breaking of the Torah is sin, we don't think there is anything to repent of.

Obedience to Yahweh's Commandments is absolutely essential for salvation even though it is the free gift of Elohim. We can't earn our salvation, but we can throw it away by refusing to do what Yahweh has commanded us to do in His word. The fear of being labeled "legalistic" will keep many out of Yahweh's kingdom because they will be called workers of "iniquity" by Yahshua.

There are many more scriptures I could have used from both the Old and New Testaments. But I tried to keep this as short as possible and to focus on the New Testament to prove that Torah keeping is as valid for us today as it was when Moses wrote it down.

I do not keep Torah to rely on it for my salvation. I realize that my salvation comes as a free gift bought and paid for by the blood of Yahshua, our Messiah. I keep Torah because He said if I love Him, to keep His commandments. No one will go to hell for being "legalistic" and keeping the Commandments of Yahweh. Just make sure that you are keeping them out of love rather than as a mechanical requirement for salvation. That would be legalism.