

Why is Paul so Hard to Understand?

**The most frequent question asked when discussing the Pauline writings is...
I can't understand Paul!**

I agree and believe that there are valid reasons for taking such a position.

In order for us to set a solid foundation in our thinking we have to understand that Paul was a Pharisee and by Paul's own admission he continued honoring most all of the traditions of the Pharisees and continued on in such traditions as evidenced by the scriptural references shown below.

However, to understand Paul we must separate the "Old Paul from the New Paul." The Old Paul became the New Paul when on the Road to Damascus he discovered (*Acts 9*) that salvation came by belief and trust in Yeshua (Jesus) alone, without first becoming a covenant member of the Jews.

*[Act 23:6](#) But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men [and] brethren, **I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee**: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.*

*[Act 26:5](#) Which knew me **from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.***

*[Phl 3:5](#) Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, **a Pharisee**;*

The root cause of our problems when attempting to identify with Paul has to do with being misguided in trying to understand Eastern Hebraic thought through the glasses of Westernized Greek philosophy. Biblical Hebraic thinking is based on block logic that surfaces in repetitive patterns and unaltered principles, whereas Greek linear logic is evolutionary in concept and assumes that whatever has occurred in the past is not necessarily an indicator of future events.

What is most important is that we understand that block logic is not illogic, nor is it 'lesser-logic'. It's simply that Hebrews didn't seem to mind making statements that 'seemed' to contradict. Of course when we look closer we see that each statement must be understood within its subject block, or contextual block, in which it makes complete sense. This doesn't 'clear' up apparent paradoxes or tensions, but that's ok. The "secret things belong to the Lord."

Adding more difficulty to the Eastern/Western ideologies is the problem of translation. When the Scriptures are read in the English we are not always getting an accurate extraction of its original meaning from the Hebraic mind perspective. Without a doubt, the more the filtering of languages, the more chance for misinterpretation to occur.

To understand Paul, I would strongly recommend setting Scriptural Anchors as an immovable foundation, firmly established in Torah, God's teaching and instructions.

May I suggest that, a reason for Paul seemingly being so difficult to understand is due to the dismissal or non recognition of what I choose to call "Biblical Scriptural Anchors." Over many years, man made dispensational denominational philosophy has crept in, replacing the unchanging full counsel of Biblical truth. The incremental erosion and departure from the faith, once given the saints, comes at a time in history when our LORD is, in my view, getting prepared to gather His people,

ANCHOR #1

Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye **saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the **gift of God**:

Eph 2:9 **Not of works**, lest any man should boast.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus unto good works**, which God hath before ordained **that we should walk in them**.

There should be no argument that these verses advocate that salvation is **By Faith** apart from **Works**, but this passage does go on to tell us to perform **Good Works**. These **Good Works** were established from “Ancient Times,” and are the commandments contained in the Torah.

The Torah is so much more than what we see from the English word “law.” A more appropriate description for the Torah would be “**God’s teaching and instructions for righteous living.**” The tenets for righteous living given in the Torah are for believers who have entered through the door of salvation by faith alone. Therefore, the Torah has been set in place by God for believers only, and is not meant for unbelievers.

This is why we should look to the “Abrahamic Covenant” experience as the pattern of being born again through faith coming through the unilateral promise from God alone. (**Gen 15:9-18**) The “Mosaic Covenant” is a bilateral agreement made between two parties to perform the provisions of the contract. This Mosaic Covenant is the marriage contract (ketubah) made between God and man at Sinai. The marriage contract is not the Torah itself, but is the agreement (*I do!*) to keep the Torah, which is the Law of Moses.

ANCHOR #2 Rom 3:31 Do we then make void the law (Torah) through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law (Torah).

This agrees with

James 2:17 *Even so faith if it hath not works is dead.*

James 2:24 *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith alone.*

Works is the proof of ones faith, and is the witness that it is genuine, by speaking and acting in behalf of YHWH’s Torah and not that of doctrine’s of men. The works to be assigned to the believer has been predetermined before the foundations of the world. By grace through faith you are saved to do good works as God as beforehand preordained, as it is written in (**Eph 2:10**)

Above anything else we must indelibly etch into our memories that Paul has never advocated that the Law of Moses (Torah) has been done away with. The Torah is God’s eternal decree, never to be broken, and by **attempting to do** so we are inviting temporal as well as eternal judgment from the Throne of Grace. .

If we have even the slightest notion that Paul is leaving the Torah behind,....Think Again!.... because the problem is not with Paul, it is with our misguided ignorance of the Scriptures.

My friend Brad Scott repeatedly states that “Words Mean Things.” If we do not understand how a word or term is used contextually in any given expression we can easily be misled. This should not be difficult to take hold of! Nevertheless, I will do my best in explaining these terms and their meaning as they appear in their specific context.

When we are reading the Scriptures in English we may not be aware that we are not always receiving an accurate account of what is being said due to the text being filtered through Greek etc. to English. Because of this, it makes it even more difficult to understand Paul's writings than it was in Peter's day. Peter's statement in (**2Pe 3:16**) tells us that Paul is hard to be understood. So, if it was difficult for Peter to understand Paul, how much more for us?

The word law in the English is somewhat generic in that it does not provide the words specific meaning as it is being used in each of the entries of the text. In the Greek, the Word for "law is Nomos" and in the "Hebrew is Torah." Torah can be law as well as nomos, but Torah is much more than that, because in it contains the fullness of God's teaching and instructions from the Hebraic perspective for righteous living.

We can only begin to understand Paul by examining his point of view before and after his conversion. After his conversion Paul was having difficulty with judaizers, who insisted gentiles coming into the faith could only be saved by first becoming converted to their traditions. They first had to become part of what they considered to be a covenant people in order to be eligible for salvation through Messiah. This conversion included physical circumcision and the circumcision of accepting the terms of the Oral Torah as part of the Law of Moses/Torah. This was Paul's pre-conversion position.

ANCHOR #3 YHWH's Word is unchanging just as He is unchanging. He is the God of **Mal 3:6** *who does not change*, of **Hebs 6:17** *the immutability of His counsel does not change*, of **Psa 119:89** *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven*, of **Heb 13:8** *Messiah Yeshua the same yesterday, and today and forever* and of **Rev1:8** *From Him which is, and which was and which is to come.*

The Father and the Son are one in perfect unity, in perfect agreement and bound to their unchanging Word; unlike changing men with their theological dispensational non-biblical inventions.

RECOGNITION OF TERMS:

The following are terms that are used in the Scriptures, that tend to confuse us, in that we have the mistaken belief that these terms have to do with the "**Law of Moses**" (**Torah**). The terms being used are "The Oral Law, Oral Tradition, Tradition of the Elders, Manner of the Law, Customs of Moses and Work's of the Law." They are not the written "Law of Moses."

The Word tells us above all things, get understanding.

Pro 4:7 *Wisdom [is] the principal thing get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*

Before Paul's conversion (**Acts Chapter 6**) we read that "there arose certain of the synagogue which is called [the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians that came to **falsely accuse** Stephen of speaking blasphemous words against the holy place and the law (nomos)).

In (**Chapter 8:1**) Paul is consenting to that which resulted in the stoning death of Stephen. His behavior at that time was not unlike the judaizers, who believing to be saved, it meant first being brought into the covenant of Israel and their traditions and then with the addition of Yeshua.

Starting in Acts

Act 6:14 *For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the **customs which Moses delivered us.***

The word **customs** here is not a reference to the “Written Law of Moses/Torah” as many have believed to be the case! In the Greek it is **ethos (St 1486)** and it is to be defined as just that, (a custom), any custom by any community, and certainly not the specific “Written Law Of Moses.”

This is not to say that the customs in and of themselves were all bad. In many cases non-biblical “rabbinical customs” have proven to be beneficial much the same as many non biblical customs adopted by the church. In any event whether good or bad these customs had nothing and has nothing to do with salvation. But the custom we see here is just that...a custom.

From there we see Paul journeying to Damascus (**Chp 9**) to continue the persecution of believers. On his way he had a confrontation with Yeshua, and from that time on Paul’s life was never the same.

Paul was unable to see after his Road to Damascus experience with Yeshua, perhaps and indicator to get Paul to realize his spiritual blindness through his physical blindness. As learned as Paul was on matters of the Torah, there was always more to learn. In any event, Paul would have his physical sight restored in short order.

Following this Paul traveled to Arabia and began the process of having his spiritual sight restored. We see this in (**Gal 1:11-18**)

Gal 1:11 But I certify you, brethren, that **the gospel** which was preached of me is **not after man.**

Gal 1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught [it], **but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

Gal 1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time **past in the Jews' religion**, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

Gal 1:14 And **profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. (the oral Torah)**

Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called [me] by his grace,

Gal 1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately **I conferred not with flesh and blood:**

Gal 1:17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

Gal 1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

Paul was emphatically clear in saying when he went to Arabia, his theology was set straight, only by the revelation of Messiah Yeshua, (**vs11&12**) separating man made laws, customs, manners and traditions from the “Written Law of Moses/Torah.”

Then, in (**Acts15:1-11**) Peter is addressing the belief of a certain sect of the Pharisees who insisted that it was needful for those gentiles coming into the faith to be circumcised which meant “physical circumcision and circumcised into Judaism” which of course meant keeping the oral tradition as well as the Written Law of Moses. Peter is refuting the position of the Pharisees, with Paul being in full agreement.

Definition belowof mixing God’s Word with Man’ doctrine.

Paradosis (St 3862) Of the body of precepts, esp. ritual, which in the opinion of the later Jews were orally delivered by Moses and orally transmitted in unbroken succession to subsequent

generations, which precepts, both illustrating **and expanding the written law, as they did were to be obeyed with equal reverence.**

What we see in *(Gal 2:16 through 3:11-18)* is Paul explaining the same problem as was being addressed in *(Acts 15:1-11)*

MAN MADE LAW vs YHWH's LAW

The terms Oral Tradition, Tradition of the Elders, The Oral Law nor Oral Torah, I repeat, is not in any way the **written** "Law of Moses". They are instead man made tenets that were put upon the people as to how to walk according to the doctrines of men. This phenomenon exists in both Judaism and Christianity etc. to this day.

God's Word is precise and an eternally closed charter, without additions or deletions.

***Deu 12:32** What thing so ever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. (**Rev 22:18-19**)*

The "**Written** Law of Moses/ Torah" was given to Moses by YHWH at Sinai. On this occasion YHWH did not instruct Moses to "**Say to the children of Israel**" but instead said "**write thou these words**"

***Exd 34:27** And YHWH said unto Moses, **Write thou these words**: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.*

***Exd 34:28** And he was there with YHWH forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And **he wrote upon the tables** the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.*

From the time of his conversion Paul is in no way saying that one could be saved by ANY of these rabbinical additions to the Torah. We must point out, once again, that this includes the "Written Law of Moses" although the way to salvation by faith is laid out in the Torah in *(Gen 15:6.)*

Back to ... ***Acts 15:1** ethos (**St 1486**) being used which has the exact verbal root and meaning as the word **custom** being used in *(Acts 6:14).**

***From here we go to Acts 22:3** I am verily a man [which am] a Jew, born in Tarsus, [a city] in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, [and] taught according to the perfect **manner of the law** of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.*

The word manner of the law **as it is used in this context has a wider application. The Greek word here for manner is.... akribes (St 196) 1) exact, careful... 2) of the strictest sect: the most precise and rigorous in interpreting the Mosaic law, and in observing even the more minute precepts of the law and tradition.**

Paul served both the Torah of Moses and the Tradition of the Elders as he would later explain to Agrippa in *(Acts 26:4-5)* about his loyalty to the most exacting sect of their religion. This is later confirmed by Paul in *(Galatians 1:14-15)* **Again, this was not about salvation, only adhering to tradition.**

Now we go to the term "**works of the law**" that is found in *(Gal 2:16, 3:2, 3:5 and 3:10)*. This is the very remote Hebrew Term "**Ma Hassay Ha Torah**" which means "**works of the law,**" and not the Law of Moses/Torah which is the Teaching and Instructions of God.

Aside from *(Romans 9:32)* which is used in another context, this phrase cannot be found anywhere in the scriptures or the rabbinical writings. It merely adds to the confusion of which law

is being addressed. Paul was tutored under Gamaliel and it was not from him. It was a HERESY. It came from the Essene community at Qumran. In the cave 4Q255 there was written in the scrolls a doctrine so to speak about purity.

The Essenes (short version) were members of a Jewish sect living in Palestine from about 100 to 200 B.C. to about A.D.100. They numbered about 4000 and had a communal life. Essenes were ascetics, and tried to avoid contamination by worldly impurity. They performed purification rites constantly and to that degree they expected others coming into their camp would be of like mind and behavior.

The Essenes titling themselves as The True Congregation of Holiness set themselves up as ones who according to their understanding interpreted how the Torah should be followed. Regulations were put in place and evangelizing people to them was not done

The Essene Position

First	Be circumcised and immersed
Second	Commit to the works of the law according to their understanding of how to apply Torah.
Third	They would be taught outside the camp for one year before entering into salvation.

The Nazarene Position

First	Trusting faith in Messiah Yeshua
Second	Commit to the Torah life style by faith, immersion
Third	Circumcision

How does one become justified?

[Gal 3:10](#) For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

[Gal 3:11](#) *But that **no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, [it is] evident: for, the just shall live by faith.***

It seems clear in (vs11) that justification does not come by the law ...**ANY LAWBUT WAIT,**

Look at what it says in (Ro2:13)

[Rom 2:13](#) *For **not the hearers of the law [are] just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.***

But then again in (Ro 3:20) it says...

[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.**

WHAT IS GOING ON?

The word justification is inexorably fused with the word righteousness.

[Rom 3:10](#) *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*

There is only one who is righteous, Messiah Yeshua, because He is more than able to save and receive justification through Him by faith. But there is a righteousness that YHWH credits to us

as we walk in His Torah commands.

Only Yeshua's righteousness can guarantee salvation, but **our righteousness** can result in long life, temporal and eternal blessings and rewards, just like Abraham. (*Gen 26:4-5*)

DT 6:24 *And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, **for our good** always, that he might preserve us alive, as [it is] at this day.*

DT 6:25 *"....And it **shall be our righteousness**, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.*

Psa 18:20 *The **LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness**; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me.*

A new birth is a representation of the "born again" experience, a new birth from above. It comes only as an act of love of the child's father and mother, not earned nor worked for. And, because a parent loves the child, the parent instructs the child to follow and obey certain house instructions that the parents may bless the child for obeying those instructions.

Luk 18:30 *Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.*

Mar 10:30 *But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

And then in Romans it says

Ro 2:13 *For not the hearers of the law [are] just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*

This agrees with

James 17 *Even so faith if it hath not works is dead.*

James 2:24 *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith alone.*

Works is the proof of your faith. Works is the witness that your faith is genuine by engaging in YHWH's instructions/Torah and not by the teaching of men. You do not get saved by works; you are saved to do good works as God as beforehand preordained as it is written in (**Eph 2:10**)

And now here again we have agreement in (Gal 2:16) with (Romans 3:20)

Gal 2:16 *Knowing that a man is not justified by the **works of the law**, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by **the works of the law**: for by the **works of the law** shall no flesh be justified.*

Again Paul is saying that works cannot justify anyone unto salvation.

Simply put, faith brings salvation and it is not due to anything one has done, it is an act of grace of God alone, but once we are saved it is our obligation out of love for Messiah to keep His Commandments; and as a result, He promises to pour out His blessing to us in this life and the next.

AS an aside..... (**Acts 15: 8-11**)

Act 15:8 *And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as [he did] unto us;*

Act 15:9 *And put no difference between us and them, **purifying their hearts by faith.***

Act 15:10 *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a **yoke** upon the neck of the disciples, **which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?***

(* **yoke** has to do with the traditions of the elders/man made laws)

Mat 11:29 Take my **yoke** upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Mat 11:30 For my **yoke** [is] easy, and my **burden** is light. Unlike the **yoke** of the Judaizers

1st John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and **His commandments are not burdensome.**

Jn 14:15 *If you love me keep my commandments.*

Whose commandments is Yeshua speaking of? **His of course.** He wrote them at Sinai where the Torah was given.

Yeshua is saying that His Yoke is the Torah or the Written Law of Moses and it is not burdensome, or in other words not difficult to live up to. In summation we could go on and on with many examples proving that the Law of Moses/Torah has not been done away with.

What we do have to realize is that YHWH's principles never change, His teaching and instructions (Torah/Written Law of Moses) never changes. We are the ones who have changed, each going his way, and becoming lost.

Keep in mind that the curse of the law (Torah) is that we cannot obey the Torah. Our inability to obey creates a sin debt that someone has to pay for. That was done by Messiah at Calvary when **our sin debt** was nailed to the tree releasing us from the curse of the law.

In conclusion let's take a look at several verses that truly demonstrates Paul's position on keeping the Law of Moses/Torah. This is something important to think about.

Rom 3:31 *Do we then make void the law (Torah) through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law (Torah)*

Rom 7:22 *For I delight in the law (Torah) of God after the inward man:*

Psa 40:8 *I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law (Torah) [is] within my heart.*

Notice that the closing verse ending says "thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. It has no mention of gaining salvation, only the allusion to being blessed as we prepare our hearts to serve according to His Torah.

Joshua 1:8 *This book of the law (Torah) shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*