

Romans 8:1-4

Pastor: Romans 8:1-4: The law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death.

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

8:1 The “I” sinner of Romans ch. 7, having expressed his frustration over recognizing the value of God’s Torah, but not quite being able to keep it, came to the conclusion: “It is an agonizing situation, and who can set me free from the prison of this mortal body? I thank God there is a way out through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24-25a, Phillips New Testament).¹ The answer to the sin problem is salvation in Yeshua the Messiah! And so continuing in Romans ch. 8, the Apostle Paul will communicate to the Romans what this means, both individually to those who have received forgiveness from their sins, and corporately what it means to the Body of Messiah and salvation history yet to come.

The resolution of Romans 8:1 is, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua,” *katakrima* (κατάκριμα) involving “**judicial pronouncement upon a guilty person, condemnation, punishment, penalty**” (BDAG).² Yeshua the Messiah, in His sacrifice for human sinners, took upon Himself the condemnation pronounced in the Torah upon its violators—which includes every man, woman, and child on Earth (cf. Isaiah 24:5).³ Paul’s previous statement in Romans 5:1 exclaimed, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah.” Interestingly enough, referencing Romans 6:14, “for you are not under law but under grace,” a general resource like the *NIV Study Bible* asserts, “The law brings condemnation because it points out, stimulates and condemns sin. But the Christian is no longer ‘under law.’”⁴ Such is true: born again Believers are not under the condemnation of the Torah, but are to instead be led by the Spirit (Romans 8:4; cf. Galatians 5:18). As will be explained by Paul, though, a person who is set on things of the Spirit will do things in conformity to the Torah of God (Romans 8:5-7).

8:2 What is Paul intending to communicate in Romans 8:2 following, when he asserts, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and of death?” Clearly two things are being contrasted, as *ho nomos tou pneumatos tēs zōēs* (ὁ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς), “the law of the Spirit of life,” has freed those who are redeemed from *tou nomou tēs hamartias kai tou thanatou* (τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου), “the law of sin and death.” Not infrequently, one will encounter some contemporary and misguided Christian pastors or laypeople claiming that the latter of the two, “the law of sin and death,” is in actuality all that the Torah or the Law of Moses is good for, and thusly that it must be abolished for the post-resurrection era.

Previously in Romans 7:7-25, readers have just witnessed the dilemma of a typical “I” sinner, who recognizes the high spiritual value of the Torah’s commandments, but who is innately unable to humanly keep them, consequently carrying with him great guilt and condemnation before the Holy One. He comes to the inevitable conclusion that only by finding redemption in the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, can the condemnation pronounced by the Torah upon lawbreakers be broken. Romans 8:1-9 in total details the condition that a person redeemed from the Torah’s condemnation upon sinners experiences.

If the “law of sin and death” is to be viewed as being the total or all of the Mosaic Torah, then should not such Instruction be thought to have brought nothing but death and mayhem to God’s people? Such a view could be used to say that the Fifth Commandment, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17),

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

² *BDAG*, 518.

³ Consult the FAQ, “Isaiah 24:5.”

⁴ *NIV Study Bible*, pp 1756-1757.

the Biblical prohibition against unwarranted death which is designed to prevent death, *actually brings death!* This is, at the very least, misguided logic in interpreting the Scriptures.

More consistent for professional examiners of Romans, Romans 8:2 has been read from the perspective that “The law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua” versus “the law of sin and death” concerns two functional conditions or situations of the Torah, in terms of whether a person is regenerated and granted eternal life *or* unregenerated and living a life of sin, disobedience, and separation from God. The born again Believer keeps God’s Torah guided by His Spirit, something clearly to be set against God’s Torah in conflict with a sinner’s fallen nature. Approaching Romans 8:2 from this perspective, Tim Hegg explains,

“The Torah of life, then, is the living Torah (Heb 4:12) which, energized by the Spirit in connection with the work of Yeshua, enables the word of God to become more active in the life of the believer, changing him and conforming him to the image of Yeshua Himself. This work of the Spirit in connection with Torah (‘so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit,’ cf. 7:6) in the life of the believer is evidence that a true saving work has been done, and that condemnation is no longer to be feared.”⁵

Hegg, however, appears to be inconsistent in the modification of the NASB that he provides in his commentary for Romans 8:2: “For the Torah of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and death.”⁶ While the first reference to “law” in Romans 8:2 is thought to be the Torah of Moses operative via God’s Spirit as He intended, the second reference to “law” in Romans 8:2 is thought to instead be some kind of a spiritual law or principle, with Hegg offering 7:23 as corroborating evidence: “I see a different law [*heteron nomon*, ἕτερον νόμον].”

Another way of looking, at the two contrasting concepts in Romans 8:2, is to view *nomos* (νόμος) from the perspective of it being “principle, rule” (CGEDNT),⁷ and not specifically a reference to the Torah of Moses. From this viewpoint, then, *nomos* in Romans 8:2 would be referencing two spiritual laws or spiritual constants, not unlike one of the many laws of the universe such as “what goes up must come down.” “The law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua” is that spiritual constant demonstrated within a person, who recognizes Yeshua as Lord, is declared free of guilt and condemnation from Torah disobedience, is spiritually regenerated, and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, just as Yeshua promised His Disciples, “will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit taking up residence inside of saved persons is to set them “free from the law of sin and death.” This second spiritual law or constant is that once a person commits sin, he or she will die spiritually and experience a condition of exile from the Creator, and exist in a permanent state of condemnation and punishment if never rectified. Douglas J. Moo offers the paraphrase, calling it “the binding authority of sin that leads to death.”⁸

Romans 8:2 including two spiritual laws, principles, or powers at work, is something reflected in various English renderings beyond those which simply include “law” in lowercase, indicating some doubt as to whether the Torah of Moses is specifically in view:

“For the new spiritual principle of life ‘in’ Christ Jesus lifts me out of the old vicious circle of sin and death” (Phillips New Testament).

“For the life-giving power of the Spirit through union with Christ Jesus has set us free from the power of sin and death” (Williams New Testament).

“And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death” (NLT).⁹

⁵ Hegg, *Romans 1-8*, 198.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷ CGEDNT, 121.

Nomos meaning principle in Romans 8:2 is argued by Bruce, *Romans*, 151; Moo, *Romans*, pp 475-477; Witherington, *Romans*, 211.

⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 476.

⁹ The ISR Scriptures (2009), a Sacred Name Bible which will be seen from time to time within the broad Messianic community, actually renders v. 2 with “torah” in lowercase: “For the torah of the Spirit of life in Messiah יהושע has set me free from the torah of sin and death.”

With the flexible uses of the term *nomos* or “law” in mind—meaning that Romans 8:2 can indeed speak of spiritual laws, principles, or constants—it is important to recognize how various interpreters have taken issue with Romans 8:2 representing the Torah of Moses. John Calvin, for example, would say,

“I would not dare, with some interpreters, take *the law of sin and death* to mean the law of God. This seems too harsh an expression. Although by increasing sin the law may produce death, Paul above has deliberately declined to use this invidious expression...I have preferred to retain the word *law*, rather than to render it, with Erasmus, *right or power*.”¹⁰

In an English translation, as would be seen in a Messianic version like the TLV, it is appropriate to render *nomos* (νόμος) in Roman 8:2 as “law,” but with the theological recognition that it need not always refer to the Torah of Moses: “For the law of the *Ruach* of life in Messiah *Yeshua* has set you free from the law of sin and death” (TLV). And, even though he firmly denies any kind of post-resurrection validity of the Torah, Ben Witherington III’s remarks on *nomos* representing opposing rules or principles operative in Romans 8:2, should still be well taken:

“Here Paul does indeed speak of two laws, not one law seen from two perspectives, and it is most natural to translate *nomos* in both instances as ‘rule’ or ‘principle.’ In neither case is the reference to the Torah. Having been set free from one ruling force in one’s life, which led only to sin and death, one has come under the authority of another.”¹¹

The challenge, with viewing *nomos* as the Torah of Moses in Romans 8:2., is detectable in the conclusion of John R.W. Stott. He says, “So, shocking at it may sound, God’s holy law could be called *the law of sin and death* because it occasioned both. In this case, to be liberated from the law of sin and death through Christ is to be no longer ‘under the law’, that is, to give up looking to the law for either justification or sanctification.”¹² It is true, to be certain, that violation of God’s commandments will cause a person to exist in a realm of sin and death. This is not Stott’s mistake. His mistake in these comments is in failing to recognize that the Torah is to function in the sanctification process of the Believer via God’s Spirit, as Romans 8:4 makes clear, and ironically enough as Stott’s own comments on Romans 8:4 also make clear.

There are a wide number of theologians, who do not take the uses of *nomos* in Romans 8:2 to represent the Torah of Moses, but rather two spiritual principles at odds with one another. When viewed this way, the definite advantage is that “the law of sin and death” is not Moses’ Teaching. Yet, whether you look at Romans 8:2 contrasting two spiritual laws or two modes of operation for the Torah, no denigration of Moses’ Teaching as valuable instruction for Messiah followers is witnessed here. N.T. Wright is correct to argue, “[Paul] has spent a whole chapter arguing that, despite appearances (and despite many commentators!), the Torah remains God’s law, holy and just and good, and that it is not guilty of causing the death that comes to those who embrace it. Now he takes a step further: When God acts in Christ and by the Spirit the Torah is somehow involved as well, somehow present and active.”¹³ The problem that has needed to be rectified originates from disobedience to God’s Law, and as Paul will proceed to explain, once Believers are freed from guilt and condemnation, they can then walk by the Spirit and have a fulfilled life of obedience to Him.

8:3 The Torah or Law of Moses, on its own, is completely incapable of solving the human sin problem: “The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature” (Romans 8:3a, NLT). The dilemma of Jeremiah 7:25-26 is that “Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending *them*. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers.” Even with the

The Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament represents the two forces at work in Romans 8:2, having *torat ruach ha'chayim* (רוח הַחַיִּים) and *torat ha'cheit v'ha'mavet* (תּוֹרַת הַחַטָּא וְהַמָּוֶת).

¹⁰ Calvin, *Romans*, 157.

¹¹ Witherington, *Romans*, pp 211-212.

¹² Stott, *Romans*, 218.

¹³ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:577.

Prophets of Ancient Israel sent to decisively call the people back to obedience and adherence to God's Instruction, many rejected the message.

Human beings with a fallen sin nature are imperfect and are incapable of keeping God's Torah perfectly. Because we cannot perfectly keep His commandments, and indeed stand condemned before our Creator because of our disobedience to His Law, we must have a decisive, Divine answer to the sin problem. As Craig S. Keener describes it, "The heart of the problem with the law (8:3) was what it was not designed to do: it righteously teaches right from wrong, but it does not transform a person to be righteous, to undo the power of sin Adam introduced into humanity."¹⁴ The Torah itself is powerless—*To gar adunaton tou nomou* (Τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου), "For what the law was powerless to do..." (NIV)—to bring people redemption and eternal salvation. The Torah is God's bar of justice and what He considers acceptable and unacceptable, yet because of the common mortal predicament toward disobedience of His commandments, the main role that it plays for the unredeemed is to reveal their sin nature.

The answer to the human sin problem is that God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,"¹⁵ *en homoiōmati sarkos hamartias* (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας). That the Father sent His Son into the world, for the redemption of people, is a major theme of the Apostolic Scriptures (i.e. John 3:16; Galatians 4:4; 1 John 4:9), but how are readers to approach how the Son was sent, as the Goodspeed New Testament has it, "in our sinful physical form" (Romans 8:3)? The *Carmen Christi* hymn asserts how the Messiah "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness [*en homoiōmati anthrōpōn genomenos, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος*]. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8, NRSV). In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul would state, "He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The term *homoiōma* (ὁμοίωμα) or "likeness" can mean both the "state of having common experiences, likeness," and "state of being similar in appearance, image, form" (BDAG).¹⁶ That Yeshua the Messiah, as the eternal and uncreated Son of God, did experience genuine humanity, and was truly human, is something legitimately testified by Holy Scripture (cf. Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). But how far can one push Yeshua, One who was without sin, as participating in "sinful flesh"? The Message paraphrases Romans 8:3b with, "he personally took on the human condition," with the Moffat New Testament having the somewhat vague, "in the guise of sinful flesh." The Phillips New Testament has the more provocative, "to live in sinful human nature like ours," and the NLT has the relatively open-ended, "He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have."

We might need to consider how Yeshua the Messiah was tempted in the wilderness three times by Satan,¹⁷ and each time He astutely responded to the Accuser with Scripture. The crux of Yeshua responding to him was where He said, "As it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST'" (Matthew 4:7; cf. Luke 4:12), making a direct reference to Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at Massah." By telling Satan that he had no right to tempt the LORD God, Yeshua was proclaiming Himself to be God made manifest as a human man, as the Adversary really had no right to try to deter Yeshua's purpose for coming to Planet Earth.¹⁸ The Tanach is quite clear that only God can be our Savior

¹⁴ Keener, *Romans*, 99.

¹⁵ "in the likeness of sinful man" (NIV); "in the likeness of sinful humanity" (TNIV).

¹⁶ BDAG, 707.

¹⁷ Mark 1:12-13; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13.

¹⁸ The Greek verb *ekpeirazō* (ἐκπειράζω), used in Matthew 4:7 and Luke 4:12, means "to tempt" (LS, 242). It is used in the Septuagint translation of Deuteronomy 6:16 to render the Hebrew verb *nasah* (נָסָה), appearing in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice) and meaning "test, try" (BDB, 650).

While there is some variance among English translations that render these verbs as either "try/test" or "tempt," the source vocabulary speaks of temptation. It is commonly claimed by those who deny Yeshua's Divinity that "God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13). This would be a poor reading of James' assertion, because the Biblical record is clear that people have tempted God (i.e., Numbers 14:20-23), even though when tempted God does not all of a sudden become something less than the Supreme Creator. The point taken, rather, is that because of God's very nature as God He cannot *be persuaded* by temptation with evil motives.

(i.e. Isaiah 45:21; Hosea 13:4), and that only He can redeem us (Psalm 49:5, 14). It should be no surprise, then, that Yeshua the Messiah is indeed called “our great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13).¹⁹

Yeshua the Messiah was no ordinary human being, being God in human flesh. So how are we to view *homoīōma* or “likeness,” then? Moo properly details,

“[T]he word does not suggest superficial or outward similarity, but inward and real participation or ‘expression.’ It may be, then, that Paul wants simply to say that Christ really took on ‘sinful flesh.’ But this may be going to far in the other direction...Paul is walking a fine line here. On the one hand, he wants to insist that Christ fully entered into the human condition, became ‘in-fleshed’ (*in-carnis*), and, as such, exposed himself to the power of sin (cf. 6:8-10). On the other hand, he must avoid suggesting that Christ so participated in this realm that he became imprisoned ‘in the flesh’ (cf. the negative use of this phrase in 7:5 and 8:8, 9) and became, thus, so subject to sin that he could be personally guilty of it.”²⁰

Colin G. Kruse offers a fair solution to the Messiah entering into the world “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” by concluding, “we should think of Christ (by virtue of his virgin birth and having been conceived by the Holy Spirit) being like the primeval couple in their original state, and so take ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ to imply that Christ identified with humanity in his incarnation but did not share their sinful flesh.”²¹ This would concur with Yeshua the Messiah being a kind of Second Adam, meaning that He would be all of the things that First Adam failed to be (Romans 5:14-19).

Yeshua the Messiah was sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” *peri hamartias katekrinen tēn hamartian en tē sarki* (περὶ ἁμαρτίας κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί), “concerning sin he condemned – sin in the flesh” (Brown and Comfort).²² Major English versions like the NASU have “*offering* for sin,” and others like the RSV just have “for sin,” for the clause *peri hamartias* (περὶ ἁμαρτίας), with the REB having the slight paraphrase “to deal with sin.” That Yeshua the Messiah was sent into the world to provide an atoning solution to the human sin problem is undeniably true (Isaiah 53:10; Colossians 1:22), but does *peri hamartias* in Romans 8:3b pertain to a sin offering or perhaps to Yeshua overcoming the power of sin? Elsewhere, in Hebrews 4:15, we see how “we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin,” as Yeshua the Messiah legitimately resisted the temptations of sin by participating in the human experience. However, as is seen in various Septuagint uses of *peri hamartias*, the terminology is frequently used in association with providing an offering for sin:

“He shall also bring his guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed [Heb. MT: *‘al chatta’t, חַטָּאתָּ עַל*; Grk. LXX: *peri tēs hamartias, περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας*], a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin. But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD his guilt offering for that in which he has sinned, two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a sin offering [Heb. MT: *l’chatta’t, חַטָּאתָּ לְ*; Grk. LXX: *peri hamartias, περὶ ἁμαρτίας*] and the other for a burnt offering...But if his means are insufficient for two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then for his offering for that which he has sinned, he shall bring the tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering [Heb. MT: *l’chatta’t, חַטָּאתָּ לְ*; Grk. LXX: *peri hamartias, περὶ ἁμαρτίας*]; he shall not put oil on it or place incense on it, for it is a sin offering [Heb. MT: *ki chatta’t, חַטָּאתָּ כִּי*; Grk. LXX: *peri hamartias, περὶ ἁμαρτίας*]” (Leviticus 5:6-7, 11).

“Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, “This is the law of the sin offering: in the place where the burnt offering is slain the sin offering [Heb. MT: *ha’chatta’t, חַטָּאתָּ הֵיא*; Grk. LXX: *peri tēs hamartias, περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας*] shall be slain before the LORD; it is most holy” (Numbers 6:25).

¹⁹ For a further examination, consult the author’s article “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Divinity of Yeshua,” appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*.

²⁰ Moo, *Romans*, pp 479-480.

²¹ Kruse, *Romans*, 326.

²² Brown and Comfort, 551.

“But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering [Heb. MT: *asham*, אָשָׁם; Grk. LXX: *peri hamartias*, περί ἁμαρτίας], He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in *His* hand” (Isaiah 53:10).

“Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; My ears You have opened; burnt offering and sin offering [Heb. MT: *chata'ah*, חַטָּאת; Grk. LXX: *peri hamartias*, περί ἁμαρτίας] You have not required” (Psalm 40:6).²³

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the clause *peri hamartias* is also used to describe an offering made for sin:

“IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN [*peri hamartias*, περί ἁμαρτίας] YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE [Psalm 40:6]...After saying above, ‘SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN [*peri hamartias*, περί ἁμαρτίας] YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE [Psalm 40:6] *in them*” (which are offered according to the Law)” (Hebrews 10:6, 8).

“For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as *an offering* for sin [*peri hamartias*, περί ἁμαρτίας], are burned outside the camp” (Hebrews 13:11).

There is substantial justification for a version like the NASB to have “*as an offering* for sin” for Romans 8:3b, given the various uses in the Septuagint and in Hebrews, where the clause *peri hamartias* does relate to the presentation of some kind of sacrificial offering. Wright appropriately summarizes,

“The phrase καὶ περί ἁμαρτίας (*kai peri hamartias*) can, it is true, mean simply ‘and to deal with sin’ in a more general sense. But this is the regular phrase that, in the LXX, translates the Hebrew terms for the specific sacrifice known as the sin-offering. Why would Paul refer to this sacrifice here in particular? Because in the biblical codes that deal with the whole sacrificial system the sin-offering is designed to deal, not with any and every sin, but with sin that has been committed ignorantly or unwillingly. Either one did something without realizing it was sinful; or, knowing it was sinful, one did it despite intending not to.”²⁴

Taking the clause *peri hamartias* as meaning something other than Yeshua being presented as a sacrificial offering, so that sin can be condemned once and for all, would surround the statement, “He condemned sin in the flesh.” While sin is condemned via Yeshua’s sacrifice for sinful humanity, some may think that this condemnation of sin involves Yeshua’s being sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh” and His conquering the temptations of sin as Second Adam. In view of the Septuagint uses of *peri hamartias*, where the presentation of sacrificial offerings is clearly detailed, we should think this alternative view very unlikely. However, given the possible, multiple dimensions of Yeshua condemning sin in His sacrificed flesh, it can be a bit more useful for the clause *peri hamartias* to be translated with the more open English, “concerning sin” (LITV, Brown and Comfort²⁵; Marshall²⁶).

8:4 With the Messiah having been sacrificed as the solution to the human sin and condemnation problem, it has resulted in something extremely important in relationship to the Torah or Law of Moses. Yeshua has been offered up, “so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4). It is widely recognized among examiners that Romans 8:4 has a direct relationship to the Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 New Covenant promise of God writing His Torah or Law onto the hearts and minds of His people, by His Spirit, supernaturally enabling them to keep His commandments:

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a

²³ Other Septuagint passages to be considered include: Leviticus 14:31; Ezekiel 42:13.

²⁴ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:579.

²⁵ Brown and Comfort, 551.

²⁶ Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 461.

husband to them,' declares the LORD. 'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the LORD, **'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares the LORD, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more'" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances"** (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

What is labeled as *to dikaiōma tou nomou* (τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου), "the righteous requirement of the law" (ESV) or "the ordinance of the law" (American Standard Version), being fulfilled by those who walk by God's Spirit, surely regards a life that is lived according to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The term *dikaiōma* (δικαίωμα) can mean both, "**a regulation relating to just or right action, regulation, requirement, commandment,**" and "**an action that meets expectations as to what is right or just, righteous deed**" (BDAG).²⁷ It does describe some kind of a substantial action to be performed by the people of God. TDNT summarizes how for *dikaiōma*, "The most common sense in the NT is 'statute,' 'ordinance,' especially the divine ordinances in Lk. 1:6; Rom. 2:26; Heb. 9:1 (cultic regulations), or God's moral decree in Rom. 1:32, or the whole law of God in Rom. 8:4...The word is then used for a 'right action' in fulfilment of a legal requirement."²⁸

While there is a long history of Christian interpreters since the Protestant Reformation, particularly among the Reformed tradition, who would argue that Romans 8:4 implies that the Holy Spirit will cause obedience to the Old Testament's high ethical and moral statutes—it has to be noted that there are some who would be more limiting to what "the law's requirement" (HCSB) would be. Quite frequently, the *dikaiōma* is often thought to basically be only limited to the Torah's "love commandment" (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8),²⁹ or to some kind of slimmed down series of expectations highly emphasized by the Torah that may be obeyed.

A theologian like Witherington,³⁰ who believes that the Torah of Moses has been abolished for the post-resurrection era, thinks that "the just requirement of the law" (RSV/NRSV) is more of a reference to a separate, although similar in some respects, "law of Christ" (cf. Galatians 6:1-2). Sadly, though, his Romans commentary makes no reference at all to the New Covenant prophecies seen in the Tanach. Wright's view is much better, as it focuses more on the content, as he concludes that "it is likely...that *to dikaiōma tou nomou* here refers to the verdict that the law announces rather than the behavior which it requires."³¹ His Kingdom New Testament has "the right and proper verdict of the law" for Romans 8:4.

Obviously, no intelligent and spiritual Bible reader should deny or deride the Torah's clear imperative for God's people to be holy (Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7), and how the Apostle Paul appeals to the Torah so that people might love each other (Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:22). The classic problem evidenced in much of contemporary Christianity with fulfillment of the Torah or Law is **not** with an emphasis on the need to love God and neighbor, which can truly be accomplished by the Holy Spirit inside of His people; the problem is that it is commonly believed that loving God and neighbor is where obedience *stops*, not where it *begins*. An additional problem can be created by a kind of dualism, where only ethical and moral instructions in the heart and mind matter, and external instructions that require some physical actions may not. A Biblical wholism, where the redeemed in Messiah, walking by the Spirit, will allow the Spirit to transform the entire human person, and his or her actions. As Paul would notably say in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "For you have been bought

²⁷ BDAG, 249.

²⁸ G. Schrenk, "*dikaiōma*," in TDNT, 176.

²⁹ Kruse, *Romans*, pp 328-329.

³⁰ Witherington, *Romans*, pp 214-215.

³¹ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:577.

with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” Today’s Messianic people would commonly think that walking by the Spirit, in adherence to God’s Torah, would involve not only a stellar inward heart morality, but also external actions like keeping the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, and eating a kosher-style diet.

F.F. Bruce describes how “God undertakes to give his people a ‘new heart’ and a ‘new spirit’—in fact, his own Spirit, sent to dwell within them so that they will henceforth do his will spontaneously.”³² It is absolutely true that given a will to obey by the Holy Spirit, that having new hearts and minds focused on the Lord and His ways, that people will often obey His Instruction spontaneously—perhaps without any specific knowledge of certain details. At the same time, though, while God’s Spirit will direct redeemed people to keep—sometimes without their conscious knowledge—God’s Law, God’s Spirit will also frequently direct a person to the Holy Scriptures, as well as impart a sincere desire within them to study and mediate upon the Scriptures.

More concurrent with the New Covenant promises of the Tanach, the gift of the Holy Spirit to regenerated people is such “that the requirement of the *Torah* might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the *Ruach*” (Romans 8:4, TLV), or “that the just requirement of the *Torah* might be fulfilled in us who do not run our lives according to what our old nature wants but according to what the Spirit wants” (CJB/CJSB). In so walking by the Spirit, obedience to God’s Torah is to come naturally. *To dikaiōma tou nomou plērōthē en hēmin* (τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῆ ἐν ἡμῖν) means “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (KJV) *precisely* by the Holy Spirit which guides our every step and action. If a struggling sinner can recognize “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Romans 7:12), **then a born again Believer should realize it even more so!** Should a redeemed man or woman ever stray from the Torah, the presence of the Lord should convict the person to go to Him in prayer for forgiveness. Lest the idea that the redeemed should walk in a total phobia of God as they seek to obey Him, C.E.B. Cranfield offers the excellent observation,

“πληρωθῆ [*plērōthē*] is not to be taken to imply that the faithful fulfill the law’s requirement perfectly...They fulfil it in the sense that they do have a real faith in God (which is the law’s basic demand), in the sense that their lives are definitely turned in the direction of obedience, that they do sincerely desire to obey and are earnestly striving to advance even nearer to perfection.”³³

Still, even with a verb like *plērōthē* recognized as an aorist passive, and likely a Divine passive at that—meaning that it is the presence of God via His Spirit that helps Believers fulfill the Torah—Believers still need to be firmly committed to a walk of faith which will demonstrate itself in concrete actions. In the estimation of James R. Edwards,

“The Spirit is the supernatural reinforcement of God’s grace who empowers [Believers] to fulfill the intent and requirements of the law. Paul does not say that one must keep the law in order to be saved but that one must be saved in order to keep the law!...According to verse 4, the Spirit reveals the essence of the law and enables [Believers] to conform to its fundamental intent, even if not to its every detail.”³⁴

Even with being a bit limited to only the perceived ethical and moral statutes of the Torah in view, Stott also astutely explains,

“Looking back over the whole passage which runs from 7:1 to 8:4, the continuing place of the law in the Christian life should be clear. Our freedom from the law (proclaimed for instance in 7:4, 5 and 8:2) is not freedom to disobey it. On the contrary the law-obedience of the people of God is so important to God that he sent his Son to die for us and his Spirit to live in us, in order to secure it. Holiness is the fruit of trinitarian grace, of the Father sending his Son into the world and his Spirit into our hearts.”³⁵

Noting the usage of the verb *plēroō* (πληρώω) in Romans 8:4 for “fulfilled,” and how it also appears in Yeshua’s word of Matthew 5:17 about Him coming to fulfill the Torah, James D.G. Dunn’s observations on Romans 8:4 need to be considered as well:

³² Bruce, *Romans*, 153.

³³ Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 384.

³⁴ Edwards, *Romans*, 203.

³⁵ Stott, *Romans*, 222.

“...Paul’s usage here is not so distant from that of Matt 5:17 as might at first appear...On the other hand, it does not follow that Paul envisages the possibility of a sinless life here...rather a life in accordance with God’s intention in the law, including his provision in the death of Christ as sin offering. At the same time it is obvious that Paul has in mind the role of the law as the standard or yardstick of what God wants, and so of a ‘doing’ or ‘keeping’...of the law in some positive sense.”³⁶

Dunn is keen to further note,

“Since περιπατέω [*peripateō*], ‘conduct oneself,’ would evoke the typical Jewish image of walking in the law(s) of God...Paul clearly intends to imply that this is only possible as an eschatological reality, as enabled by the Spirit given in the outworking of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”³⁷

God’s Torah plays a definite role for the redeemed person who acknowledges the sacrifice of Yeshua which takes away the penalty of eternal punishment. And, even while we should correctly acknowledge that Paul is using *nomos* in Romans 8:4 to refer to the Torah of Moses lived out properly by the Spirit, in the lives of born again Believers—even those who think that the Mosaic Torah has been abolished recognize that some kind of Spirit-empowered obedience is in view here. In view of Witherington’s position that an independent “Law of Christ” is what is actually being addressed, he draws the conclusion,

“In light of texts like Gal. 6:1-2 it would seem clear that Paul means that what the Law really intended and was meant to accomplish is in fact accomplished in the life of the believer by means of the death of Christ and the Holy Spirit’s presence, which allows the believer to walk in newness of life and to love God and neighbor wholeheartedly. This is what the new Law of Christ is all about. It is a different law from the Mosaic Law, though it has some of the same stipulations and imperatives.”³⁸

Ironically enough, though, those who opt for the view that the Law which is to be fulfilled in the hearts of Believers is some independent “Law of Christ” largely divorced from the Law of Moses—while rightly emphasizing the ever-critical commands to love God and neighbor—are frequently forced to turn to Yeshua’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7) for a definition of what such an independent “Law of Christ” would compose. Yet, Yeshua’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is, in fact, predicated on the continued validity of Moses’ Teaching (cf. Matthew 5:17-19).

What Romans 8:4 communicates, “Therefore we are able to meet the Law’s requirements, for we are living no longer by the dictates or our sinful nature, but in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit” (Phillips New Testament), is decisively a part of what I have often referred to as the model of **Supernatural Compulsion**, when it comes to how born again Believers should be obeying the Lord. Such a model of supernatural compulsion—namely the work of the Holy Spirit on a heart and mind transformed by the good news or gospel—has to be offered as a viable, Biblical alternative to the more common, and far more negative, “obligation” models of obedience, as presented by many others in the Messianic community, and which sadly do often breed forms of legalism, works-righteousness,³⁹ and other forms of self-superiority.

While Romans 8:4 is a strong proof text that can be offered in favor of the continued validity of the Torah for the post-resurrection era, it needs to be recognized, as Cranfield states, how “The gospel was certainly not given in order that a new legalism might be established more securely than the old.”⁴⁰ Grant R. Osborne similarly states, “What Christ has done for us on the cross (v. 2) is worked out in Spirit-empowered living, and both together fulfill the law. There are two choices—to live by the flesh or the world’s standards or to live in obedience to the Spirit’s leading.”⁴¹ The need to be tempered by the Spirit in one’s obedience to God’s Instruction is paramount, specifically because **individuals need to demonstrate the mercy and grace of God to those still under the Torah’s condemnation**, just as the “I” sinner of Romans ch. 7 was. Likewise, an individual’s adherence to God’s Instruction, as the Spirit impels him or her to obedience, is not at all

³⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a: 423-424.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 424.

³⁸ Witherington, *Romans*, pp 214-215.

³⁹ Consult the sub-section, “Sanctifying Grace: A Supernatural Compulsion to Obey God More and More,” appearing in the author’s article “Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism” (appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*).

⁴⁰ Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 384.

⁴¹ Grant R. Osborne, *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 197.

instantaneous—and some people will mature in their level or deepness of obedience *faster* than others. Those who do mature faster, need to help facilitate an environment in the greater Body of Messiah which allows for growth, but also flexibility, and above all an atmosphere where those Spirit-induced virtues such as love for God and neighbor are paramount. Hegg is right to explain,

“Note well that the direction in which the Spirit leads us is the direction of Torah-submissiveness—to obedience of God’s revealed will. Thus, the Torah is fulfilled in us the more we decide for the Spirit and against the flesh. What is more, this living according to the Spirit (which results in living out the requirement of the Torah) is a life of freedom and liberty, for in the hands of the Spirit, the Torah is the Royal Torah of Liberty (James 1:25; 2:12).”⁴²

Also to be considered is that while the Holy Spirit will compel obedience to God’s Instruction, is that the Holy Spirit should also be present to supply a redeemed human mind with the ability to reason through the proper application of the Torah. Keener draws our attention to how “Paul is thinking not of all individual commandments but of the righteous character that such commandments were intended to inculcate and point toward in an ancient Israelite context.”⁴³ The Holy Spirit, more than any other power, is to give redeemed men and women the necessary wisdom and discernment to probe the importance of God’s Torah, and with it the recognition of what commandments can be legitimately followed in the post-resurrection era. This especially includes the ability to evaluate those directions that only concerned an Ancient Israelite context in the Ancient Near East, but still teach us all important principles about God’s character.⁴⁴

Traditional Judaism has classified 613 commandments within the Torah, and all major branches and denominations of modern-day Judaism have some sort of analysis or running commentary on these directions.⁴⁵ The Messianic movement of the future will doubtlessly be forced to have some sort of comprehensive analysis of the 613 Torah commandments as well. And, when something like this is finally achieved, what we will discover is that when we claim as Messianic people that God’s Torah is valid and relevant for today, that even with some post-resurrection changes naturally enacted by Yeshua’s work, and with some commandments unable to be followed because of changes in technology or economy—that what **we will really be able to understand** are the beginning, formation actions in God’s plan of salvation history, returning humanity to what was lost at the Fall.

⁴² Hegg, *Romans 1-8*, 201.

⁴³ Keener, *Romans*, 100.

⁴⁴ Consult the author’s article “Addressing the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianics Encounter in the Torah,” appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁴⁵ Among Jewish resources to consider, include: Rabbi Yisrael Meir haKohen (The Chafetz Chayim), *The Concise Book of Mitzvot: The Commandments Which Can Be Observed Today* (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1990); Abraham Chill, *The Mitzvot: The Commandments and Their Rationale* (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 1974); Ronald H. Isaacs, *Mitzvot: A Sourcebook for the 613 Commandments* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996).