

# The Letter of the Torah vs. The Spirit of the Torah

## A Scriptural Response to Anti-Nomian Teachings

By Rabbi Edward Levi Nydle B'nai Avraham

“The True Yehudi is so in Yahweh’s hidden way, and true *bris milah* is of the *lev*, in the *hitkhdshut* (renewal) of the Ruach HaKodesh, not in *chumra* (legalism, or strict adherence to the letter of the law). Romans 2:29a (Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha –True Name added)

“But now we have become *niftar* (freed, deceased) from the dominating ownership of the Torah, having died to that by which we were confined, so that we might serve in the Ruach HaKodesh of *hitkhdshut* and newness and not in the *yoshen* (oldness) of *chumra* (legalism, strict adherence to the letter of the law). Romans 7:6

“Who has made us competent as *klei kodesh mesharetim* (ministers) of a Brit Chadasha not of *chumra* (strict adherence to the letter of the law), but of the Ruach HaKodesh: for the *chumra* (legalism-letter of the law) kills, but the Ruach HaKodesh gives *chayyim* (LIFE).” 2 Corinthians 3:6

“I keep the spirit of the law not the letter of the law! I do not want anything to do with that legalism! I am led by the Spirit!” How many of us that are of Messianic Yisrael have listened to those words from the lips of a Bible carrying SUNday “Christian” wearing their WWJD bracelet? What they are really saying is that they believe the Torah (to them it is the Old Testament) is done away with the coming of Messiah and His blood atonement for sins (Torah breaking) on the tree and they can live any way they “feel led” by the Spirit. This is the conventional anti-nomian understanding of the word “letter” and the “spirit”. Are these words antagonistic to one another? What is the interdependence of the Torah and the Ruach HaKodesh? How can we be sure we are not slipping into legalism? This teaching shall respond to these and other questions from Scripture to help bring the disciple of our Master Rebbe Yahshua to a proper understanding of these words as they are used within their appropriate context in the “Brit Chadasha” (Renewed Covenant). Words have great power. The theological terminology we use conveys with it preconceived ideas and thoughts in the minds of those who read and study the Scriptures. Traditional theology tends to use these terms to contrast two opposed concepts, when in actuality they work as a hand in a glove. The words- LETTER and SPIRIT are two of those theological words that carry with them preconceived associations due to previous teachings from the “church system”.

The traditional reading of the above Scriptures from the Renewed Covenant (Brit Chadasha) seems to abrogate the Torah as the “Old Testament” and replace it with service to Yahweh by a “New” and better way; the Ruach or the Spirit.

Without proper exegesis of Scripture and knowledge of the Torah, they appear to be opposing concepts in the writings of Rav Shaul. Most “Christians” interpret the “Letter” as the LAW or Old Testament, as contrasted with the Spirit that is viewed as the exclusive agent of the “NEW Testament”. Therefore, through their “New Testament” glasses they believe that the Torah (Yahweh’s blueprint for all creation) and the Spirit are opposed.

- “...And the Spirit of Elohim was moving on the face of the waters (a code word for the Torah). And Elohim said, Let Light come to be, and Light came to be.” Bereshith 1:2b-3

Since from the Beginning the Word of Yahweh and the Ruach are connected. But, since most people are not knowledgeable of the Torah, they have come to the conclusion that the way of the Ruach HaKodesh is NOT the way of the Torah. What does Rav Shaul (Paul) really mean when he uses these presumably opposing terms in his letters to the congregations? Did he view Torah observance in opposition to the walk in the Ruach Hakodesh? Let us search in the Scriptures and find TRUTH instead of conventional teachings. As always, if you be of a different opinion with what you read then I challenge you to prove the conclusion wrong by Scripture.

## Word Definitions

LETTER: #1121 in Strong's Concordance: *Gramma*- from #1125 (*grapho*-to write, written, describe), a writing, a letter, note, epistle, book, learning, bill, SCRIPTURE.

SPIRIT: #4151: *Pneuma*- from #4154 (*pueo*- to breath hard, to blow), a current of air, breath, breeze, spirit, vital principle, mental disposition, an angel, a demon, ghost, life, mind.

These definitions from Strong's explain to us that the Greek word *gramma* can mean Rav Shaul's letters, the Scriptures, a book, or an epistle. Surely no one in traditional "Christianity" would dare to argue that the writings in the Brit Chadasha bring death, are bondage, or done way with by the Messiah. Yet, they readily assume that the word "letter" applies to the Torah, which was the only SCRIPTURE that existed at the time of Rav Shaul's writings.

- "...and that from a babe you have known the Set-Apart SCRIPTURES (the Torah), which are able to make you wise for deliverance through belief in Messiah Yahshua. ALL SCRIPTURE is breathed by Elohim and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for setting straight, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of Elohim might be fitted, equipped for every good work." **2 Timothy 3:15-17**

Are they willing to throw away the entire Bible in order to "live by the spirit" or "breath or life"? Does it not seem that the Ruach HaEmet (Spirit of Truth) would lead them into the TRUTH contained in the entire Bible? The lips of our Rebbe called the Torah of Yahweh "the Truth". It is the Torah that sets us apart.

- "Set them apart in Your Truth-Your Word (The Torah) is Truth." **Yochanan 17:17**
- "Your righteousness is righteousness forever; and Your Torah is TRUTH." **Tehillim 119:142**

### The Letter is NOT the Torah!

It is essentially impossible for Rav Shaul to refer to the Torah as "the letter". As a Yehudi, from the Tribe of Benjamin, Rav Shaul considered the Torah inspired by the Ruach HaKodesh and SPIRITUAL!

- ""For we have *da'at* (knowledge) that the Torah is *Ruchanit* (spiritual, of the Ruach HaKodesh); but I AM of the *basar* (fallen humanity –fleshly) sold under the power of (slavemaster Chet Kadmon) *Chet* (sin)." Romans 7:14
- "So that the Torah is *kedoshah* (holy-set-apart) and the *mitzvah* (commandment) is *kedoshah* and *yasharah* and *tovah* (good)." **Romans 7:12**
- " But we know that the Torah is beneficial if anyone's use of the Torah is Torah-true" **1 Timothy 1:8**

We can conclude that from the Scriptures quoted above from the Brit Chadasha when Rav Shaul contrasted the "letter" and the "Spirit" he cannot be teaching the believers in Yahshua that the Torah is defective, inferior, out dated or a form of bondage. To arrive at that conclusion is to take Scripture out of context and arrive at a pretext. To do so is not to take into account the broad spectrum of his writings to the kehilot in the Diaspora.

So, how then should we interpret Shaul's usage of the words "letter" and "Spirit" in all the above passages?

### "Letter" is a lack of belief or "faith" in Torah observance

If we examine every context in which Rav Shaul contrasts the "letter" and "spirit" we will discover that he is speaking of those who are exercising genuine belief (faith-emunah) and those who do not. This is what the Torah has always taught from the Beginning:

- "And he believed in Yahweh, and He reckoned it to him for righteousness." **Bereshith 15:6**
- "... But the righteous one lives by his steadfastness." **Habaquq 2:4**
- For what does the Scripture (Torah) say? "Avraham believed Elohim, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness." **Romans 4:3**

In **Romans 2:28-29**, Rav Shaul is speaking about those who only have the outward physical sign (ot in Hebrew) of the covenant, which is brit milah or circumcision. But, because their lives are characterized by disobedience to the Torah, they do not possess genuine belief (faith). He is not teaching against circumcision or that it is not of any importance. His rabbinical argument is that if it is done without belief and one is relying upon his circumcision for righteous status before Elohim, then he is in error and his circumcision is counted as uncircumcision. That fact that one is born Jewish does not guarantee them a place in the olam haba (World to Come). Shaul then contrasts those who may not yet be circumcised but ARE KEEPING THE TORAH IN TRUE BELIEF. Their uncircumcision (or lack of status as a Jew) is counted as righteousness (or gives him right standing with Elohim as part of the Covenant family of Avraham because it is done in belief). Rav Shaul identifies those who are Jews and have the outward sign of circumcision but disobey the Torah as those who keep the “letter of the law”. They are relying upon their “birth status” for salvation and their position as Elohim’s family member. Being born in a bagel factory does not make one a bagel! Belief cannot be transmitted biologically. All Yisrael must be grafted back into the Olive Tree of True Yisrael by belief!

- “Also, if they (the natural branches) do not continue in unbelief (disobedience), shall be grafted in, for Elohim is able to graft them in again.” **Romans 11:23**

The reasonable conclusion then is that the “letter of the law” is connected to those who are not believers and are attempting to keep the Torah in their own strength of the flesh. Circumcision is only of value if indeed you are doing what the Torah says by belief. By disobedience to the Torah, you are throwing away the reality of the symbolic act of obedience in brit milah. An uncircumcised male inherits the promise to Avraham by belief in the Moshiach (**Romans 4 and Galatians 3**). However, according to Ya’aqob (**Ya’aqob 2**), obedience to the Torah will perfect your belief and belief without obedience cannot save! If you have belief without righteous works of the Torah then you are operating by demonic faith (**Ya’aqob 2:19**). Rav Shaul also says that the sign of circumcision puts a “seal- Greek *sphragis* or a signet, a fencing in, the stamp impressed as a mark of privacy or genuineness” of the righteousness of belief that one has before he is circumcised (**Romans 4**). Therefore, if one has authentic belief in the Word of Yahweh, he will be obedient to the Torah and its requirements.

- “And the uncircumcised by nature, who perfects the Torah, shall judge (Greek- *krinei* or will by his righteous behavior in the Torah stand as a continual judgment) you who are notwithstanding letter and circumcision are a transgressor of the Torah!” **Romans 2:27**\*\*Please notice that the one who has not yet been circumcised is already becoming obedient to the Torah.

### Romans 7

The passage in Romans chapter 7 is contrasting those who have been released from the penalty of their Torah breaking (CHET or sin), with those who are STILL UNDER CONDEMNATION OF THE TORAH DUE TO THEIR SIN! Rav Shaul makes it clear that the Torah is not to be blamed for the condemnation of sinners, but it is their OWN TORAH BREAKING THAT IS TO BE BLAMED!

- “What then shall we say? That the Torah is considered as *chet* (sin)? *Chas v’shalom!* Nevertheless, I would not have experienced *chet* except through the Torah; for I would not have known *chamdanut* (covetousness/greed) if the Torah had not said, “Lo *tachmod*”. **Romans 7:7**
- “Therefore, now there is no *gezar din* (verdict) of *ashem* (guilty), no *harsha’ah* (condemnation) for those in Moshiach Yahshua.” **Romans 8:1**

By using the term “letter of the law” in these verses, Shaul is NOT BEING NEGATIVE CONCERNING THE TORAH! The Torah itself condemns a person when belief is absent, but by bringing condemnation upon the faithless one it (the Torah) is performing its Elohim ordained functions of the blueprint for our lives.

### Paul vs. Moshe?

This same context is to be found in **2 Corinthians chapter 3** where Rav Shaul is contrasting the ministry of Moshe with his own. He says that the ministry of Moshe brought death, while his (Shaul’s) brought life! Did Moshe have bad material in the Torah and Shaul better material in the “Good News”? WRONG!

Rather, it was the hardened hearts and the stopped ears of the Israelite people that rendered Moshe's ministry one of death. Rav Shaul then expounds that when the Ruach takes away the hardness of heart and opens the ears of the deaf, the very message (the Torah) that Moshe preached and taught to Yisrael GIVES LIFE TO THE HEARER! You have to remember the only Scriptures that were around in Rav Shaul's ministry were the TaNaK. When the work of the Ruach (the taking away of the veil) is manifested in a person's life, then the glory of the Moshiach shines forth bringing the hearer belief and salvation!

- “Blind receive sight and lame walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf hear, dead are raised up and poor are brought the Good News.” **Mattithyahu 11:5** \*\*take this beyond the PASHAT meaning!
- “For the heart of this people has become thickened, and their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes have been closed, lest they should SEE with their eyes and HEAR with their ears, lest they should UNDERSTAND with their heart, and TURN BACK, and I heal them.” **Mattithiyahu 13:15**
- “But their minds were hardened, for to this day, when the old covenant is being read, the same veil remains, not lifted, because in Moshiach it is taken away. But to this day, when Moshe is read, a veil lies on their heart. And when one turns to the Master, the veil is taken away. Now Yahweh is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of Yahweh is, there is freedom. **2 Corinthians 3:14-17**
- “So this I say, and witness in the Master, that you should no longer walk as the goyim walk, in the futility of their mind, having been darkened in their understanding...” **Ephesians 4:17-18a**
- “So then belief comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Elohim (the Torah)” **Romans 10:17**
- “For Moshiach is the goal (telos-end purpose not termination also see 2 Cor.3: 13) of the Torah unto righteousness (right standing before Elohim) to everyone who BELIEVES!” **Romans 10:4**

The Ruach Hakodesh is essential for one to truly comprehend the message of the “Good News” found in the Torah. If one is to reach the GOAL of the Torah, you MUST have the Ruach Hakodesh to lead you into the TRUTH of the Moshiach found therein. Without the Ruach, the Moshiach is completely overlooked as one reads from the Torah, whether they are Jewish or a non-Jew. The Torah they studied and lived by was perfect and good in every way, but THEY failed to reach the goal of the Torah, the person of the Moshiach. The Ruach will always lead a person into TRUTH. The TRUTH is that Yahshua is the Moshiach. To read from the Torah scroll without the enlightenment (LIGHT) of the Ruach HaKodesh is to remain in the darkness and miss the mark of the goal, and the result is condemnation and judgment.

- “But when the *Melitz Yosher* (Praklit, Advocate, Counselor, Helper in court) comes, whom I will send to you from *HaAv*, the Ruach Hakodesh, the Ruach HaEmet (TRUTH), who proceeds from *HaAv*, that One will give solemn *edut* (witness-testimony) about Me.”, who proceeds from *HaAv*, that one will give solemn *edut* (witness-testimony) about Me.” **Yochanan 15:26**
- “But when that ONE has come, the Ruach Hakodesh, the Ruach HaEmet, he will guide you in all TRUTH (Emet)...” **Yochanan 16:13**
- “For if you were having *emunah* (belief-faithfulness) in Moshe, you would have had *emunah* (belief-faithfulness) in me, for he himself wrote concerning Me (Bereshith **3:15, 45:4-9; Devarim 18:15**). But if in the *Kitvei Hakodesh* (The Holy Writings-Torah) of that one (Moshe) you lack *emunah*, how will you have *emunah* in My *D'var* (Word)? **Yochanan 5:42**
- “And having begun from Moshe Rabbenu and from all the *Neviim*, He explained to them the things concerning Himself.” **Lukas 24:27**
- “Good and straight is Yahweh; Therefore He teaches the sinners in the WAY. He guides the meek ones in His way. All the paths of Yahweh are kindness and TRUTH, to those who guard His covenant and His witness.” **Tehillim 25:8-10**

### What is Legalism?

The term “legalism” is not found in the Scriptures! To wrongfully conclude that the word “letter” is referring to the Torah and its observance is based upon misinterpretations of Scripture. Anyone who thinks the Torah is too difficult to observe and it had to be replaced with “grace” and a “New Covenant”. No where in the Scriptures does it state the Torah is too difficult to do. In fact, it states the opposite!

- “For this command which I am commanding you today, IS NOT TOO HARD FOR YOU, nor is it far off.”  
**Devarim 30:11**
- “For finding fault WITH THEM (not the Torah)...” **Ivrim 8:8a**
- “For I delight on the Torah of Elohim according to the inward man, but I see another law (torah) in my members, battling against the Torah of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the torah of sin which is in my members.”  
**Romans 7:22-23**

The Torah was given to be obeyed! It is unthinkable that a Righteous Elohim would give instructions to His children that were impossible to keep. Yahweh is love, and He does not play cruel games with His creation.

Yes, the people of Yisrael fell short of keeping the Torah, but the Torah itself provided a sacrificial system to deal with their sin because of Yahweh’s grace and chesed. It has always been a system of belief in the blood of the sacrifice, and not ones own self-righteousness! The Torah is does not set an impossible standard. Rather, it sets a standard of belief, complete trust in Elohim, and following its system of teshuvah and sacrifice for atonement restored one to righteousness in the sight of Yahweh. To think that the Torah is bad or inferior impugns on the character of Yahweh.

So what is “legalism”? Is it the written letters of the Torah? NO! The Greek word *erga* or works in the plural means actions stemming from a boastful, self-righteous belief that by doing the mitzvot of the Torah, and by following a set of rules in one’s own strength, WITHOUT BELIEF IN YAHWEH OR ANY FAITHFULNESS TO HIM, one can earn Yahweh’s praise and be awarded status in His Covenant Family and have a place in the World to Come. Self strength Torah observance are produced when sinful people misuse and pervert the written Torah into a rule book of religious requirements that they can observe ritualistically without BELIEF or TRUST in Yahweh, and therefore can take great pride in their own accomplishments and have great self-satisfaction that they have pleased Elohim by their performance. This is a perversion of what the Torah teaches and is what Rav Shaul was opposed to in his letters. This was the “spirit” that was behind the Torah observance of the P’rushim and Scribes in the time of Yahshua. Our Rebbe never spoke against the Torah, but did speak of THE HEART CONDITION AND MOTIVATION OF THOSE WHO KEPT THE TORAH!

- “So you outwardly indeed appear righteous to men, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.”  
**Mattithyahu 23:28**

### **Conclusion**

From a Hebraic perspective and a proper context of Scripture, we can determine that Rav Shaul never viewed the Torah as the “letter of the law”. The word “letter” NEVER REFERS TO THE SCRIPTURE OF THE TIME WHICH WAS THE TORAH! In all his writings, just as the Torah teaches, Shaul continuously emphasizes the need of True-Torah observance by the Ruach Hakodesh and TRUE BELIEF in Elohim through the Moshiach Yahshua. Without the Ruach, the Moshiach remains concealed within the inspired words of the Torah. The “Spirit” is always the life-giving work of the Ruach IN CONNECTION TO THE TORAH AND ITS OBSERVANCE, which will always lead one to the Moshiach and always imparts LIFE!

- “For it is not a worthless Word for you, because IT IS YOUR LIFE, and by THIS WORD (the Torah) you prolong your days on the soil which you pass over the Yarden to possess.” **Devarim 32:47**

The true Scriptural meaning of the contrast of the “letter” and the “Spirit” is the contrast of Torah observance by belief and observance by no belief, the work of the Ruach verses the work and reliance upon the flesh, and obedience to the Torah through the empowerment of the Ruach over attempting to please Elohim by works of the flesh. Rav Shaul IS NOT PUTTING THE TORAH AND THE RUACH IN A CONFLICT. He is teaching that the Ruach and the Torah always work together in a partnership and in complete agreement.

There is no “new way of salvation”, but rather multitudes of returning Yisraelites and Yahudim worshipping the Elohim of Yisrael (Yahweh) through the very same means given to the ancient Patriarchs of our Faith: Belief in the Moshiach and the empowerment of the Ruach HaKodesh.

- “And the *Kitvei HaKodesh* (Holy Writing) having foreseen that Yahweh would *yatzdik* (justify) the *Goyim* by *emunah* (belief), preached the *Besuras HaGeulah* (Good News) to Avraham Avinu saying, “ *Venivrechu vo kol goyei ha'aretz* (all the families of the earth will be blessed in you).” **Galatians 3:8**
- “Avraham your *Av* had *lev same'ach* to see the *Yom* of me (the Yom HaMoshiach), and he saw it and had *simcha* (joy).” **Yochanan 8:56**

Apart from the Ruach, no one has been able to serve Yahweh in true belief of obedience and follow the Torah. Trying to observe the mitzvot of the Torah in our own strength will only bring about death.

- “For the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace.” **Romans 8:6**

But when the Ruach HaChayyim takes the veils off the hearts and minds of people and empowers them to live in obedience to the Torah, it brings LIFE! According to Rav Shaul there is a solid connection between the Torah and the Ruach and they NEVER NEED TO BE OPPOSED TO ONE ANOTHER AS TRADITIONAL TEACHING PROCLAIMS!

- “ But a shah (hour-time) is coming, and now is, when those of the true *avodet* (service) *kodesh* will worship *HaAv* in the Ruach Hakodesh and in *Emet* (Truth), for indeed *HaAv* is seeking such to worship Him.” **Yochanan 4:23**
- “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also the belief is DEAD without the works.” **Ya’aqob 2:26**
- “So that the righteousness of the Torah should be completed in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” **Romans 8: 4**

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### “A Subjective Judge” By Rabbi Edward Levi Nydle

**“Know...before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting” Pirkei Avot 3:1**

**“Judge not lest you be judged. For with what *gezar din* (verdict) you judge, you will be judged, and with what measure you measure, it will be measured to you.” Mattithyahu 7:1-2**

**“For not even HaAv (the Father) judges anyone, but ALL *mishpat* (judgment) HaElohim has been given to BEN ADAM” Yochanan 5:22**

**“And if by Baal-Zibbul I cast out *shedim* (demons), by whom do your *banim* (sons) cast them out? Therefore, they will be your *shofetim* (judges)!” Mattithyahu 12:27**

**“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” Yochanan 7:24**

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov said, “When a person comes before the supernal court to account for his sojourn on earth, he is first asked to voice his opinion on another life.” “What do you think?” he is asked, “about one who has done so and so?” After he voices his verdict, it is demonstrated to him how these deeds and circumstances parallel those of his own life. Ultimately, it is the person himself who passes judgment on his own failings and achievements. All temporal and eternal judgment is the consequence of CAUSE and EFFECT.

This quote from the Baal Shem Tov explains the unusual wording of the passage from the *Pirkei Avot*. Is not the verdict handed down after the cross-examination of the defendant? So should the judgment following the accounting? And why are you destined to give judgment as opposed to being judged? THE ANSWER-No judgment is handed down from above! Only after HE HAS HIMSELF ruled on any given deed does the heavenly court make HIM account for a comparable episode in his own life.

The same idea is also implicit in another passage of the *Ethics*: “Retribution is extracted from a person, with his knowledge and without his knowledge.” As a person knowingly expresses his opinion on a certain matter, he is unwittingly passing judgment upon himself.

This is a most profound insight to the human soul. In all creation, nothing is higher than the “spark” from Elohim that is in the soul of man. This is reflected in the fact that man has been given the power of choice-FREE WILL- a power he shares only with the Creator Himself!

FREE CHOICE allows him to stumble and fall over and over again, but it also makes his potential for good infinitely greater than any of Elohim’s creatures. So even when a soul comes to stand at the bar of justice, implying that there are perhaps faults and failings in its past performance, no judge, be it the highest and most spiritual heavenly beings, has jurisdiction over its fate. The only power on earth or in the heavens that can judge man is man himself.” READ 2 Shemu’el Chapter 12