

**Biblical Cults 2 The Cult of Law**  
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**Readings**

**Torah:** Numbers 15:30-41; Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 30:11-20

**Haftarah:** Psalm 19; Malachi 3:1 – 4:6

**Apostolic:** Matthew 5:13-20, 7:13-23; 1 John 3:1-12; Romans 3:19-31

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This is part two of a four-part series called “Biblical Cults.” The idea is that there are certain cultic behaviors that have developed among Believers based on latching on to specific verses in the Bible and taking them out of context. The four “Biblical Cults” I’m going to be looking at over these four weeks are what I call The Cult of Grace (which I covered last week), The Cult of Law, The Cult of Tradition, and The Cult of Karaism or The Cult of Anti-Tradition.

First, let’s define what we mean by “cult.” The word itself comes from the Latin *cultus* care, adoration, from *colere* to cultivate. In other words, a cult is a formal religious group with identifiable followers that seeks to cultivate a specific set of beliefs that might be considered not quite kosher.

I want to admit, this was a much tougher teaching to prepare than last week’s, because last week’s perspective on The Cult of Grace was not one that tread near any real sacred ground for me. It was a message I teach a lot, about the importance of Torah and the dangers of an obsession with Grace to the exclusion of God’s Commandments. But today, I feel a bit like I’m going from preachin’ to meddlin’, as the saying goes.

So, what do I mean by The Cult of Law? The Cult of Law is made up of people for whom God’s Law is the primary message of the Bible and the whole issue involved. People for whom everything you do matters, that God’s grace through the Messiah seems not to be enough. For example, we read in:

**Matthew 5:17-19**

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

We’ve discussed this passage many times. To me, it seems obvious: everyone with faith in Messiah will be in the Kingdom, but that there will be a hierarchy in the Kingdom based on how well one kept the Commandments. In fact, that’s based on an ancient teaching embraced by Messianic sects going at least as far back as Yeshua’s day. We read about it in the governing documents of the Qumran sects – from which we get the Dead Sea Scrolls – and even in the Apostolic Writings. You may remember that the Talmidim (the Disciples) arguing over which would be greatest in the Kingdom (Matthew 18) and who would sit at Yeshua’s right and left hands (Mark 10). This is in reference to the ancient tradition that the entrance into and seating at the Messianic banquet (we would call this the Marriage Feast of the Lamb) would be according

to this ranking system. In fact, in the Qumran sect, they had annual “performance reviews” where their rankings would be determined and they used those rankings within their community.

But adherents to The Cult of Law say no, no, it doesn’t say that those who don’t keep the least of the commandments will be least in the Kingdom, it says they will be CALLED least! They say these people won’t be in the Kingdom, but apparently they believe those who are there will be speaking badly of them!

They tie this in to the following passages:

### **Numbers 15:30-31**

“But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him.”

They say that every “Christian” who eats a ham sandwich is being defiant, whether or not anyone has ever reached them with the message of Torah.

### **Deuteronomy 30:15-18**

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish.

“See, see?,” they say, those who do not keep His commandments will “surely perish.” Of course, they are ignoring the part in between, about being drawn away to worship and serve other gods... I think that’s a part of what has to happen before someone will “surely perish.”

### **Matthew 7:21-23**

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”

Because the Greek word translated “lawlessness” is “anomia” which can mean “without Torah” or “Torahlessness,” the Law Cultists say that this means those who do not keep Torah – including mainstream Christians – will not enter the Kingdom and be told to “Depart from” Yeshua! We’ll talk about what it means to “practice Torahlessness” in a bit, but first I want to point out that this passage seems to be speaking more to those who make themselves out to be God’s functionaries – prophesying and driving out demons in God’s Name – not to the average Believer.

More on this Torahlessness issue. We read in:

### **1 John 3:4-10**

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you. The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

“You see,” the Law Cultists say, “if you practice Torahlessness, you are a child of the devil, not of God!” Well, first off, I would say to these people that it’s not their place to judge their fellow man’s salvation status, since they cannot see into their hearts, but we also need to define Torahlessness. Does the average Christian actually practice Torahlessness? Even if they don’t understand what “Torah” means and talk about the burdens of the Law, are they really practicing Torahlessness?

Yeshua teaches us in Matthew 23 that there are lighter and weightier commandments, and points out some of the weightiest of all: justice and mercy and faithfulness. What average Christian disobeys these as a regular practice? What average Christian disobeys the bulk of the Ten Commandments as a regular practice? Surely, they may mouth the words taught them by their leaders about “The Law” being nailed to the Cross... but all of the statements about being cast away don’t say anything about words, but about deeds: he who PRACTICES Lawlessness. Obviously, I would say, that these people do not PRACTICE Lawlessness. Paul reminds us in:

### **Romans 2:14-16**

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Messiah Yeshua.

I am probably shocking a lot of people. How can I be saying this? Am I saying we don’t have to keep Torah? Am I giving anyone – but especially those who are not Jews in the room – permission to go out and, say, enjoy a nice big plate of shrimp? Of course not! There is a serious line that can be crossed here. As I’ve said before, sometimes the sin isn’t eating pork or gay sex or ignoring the Sabbath, even if that’s what you’re doing. If you have become convinced in your mind – as the Rabbi Paul put it – that the Torah is for you today, the sin in those cases is rebellion.

But no, no, the Law Cultists say. This is not enough. You must maintain total fidelity and obedience to The Law or you will be cast away! The danger of The Cult of Law is that NO ONE

maintains TOTAL fidelity and obedience to The Law! Yeshua castigated the Scribes and Pharisees for such hypocrisy!

This is what Paul meant when he talked about legalism and trying to be saved by Works of the Law. This is what he fought against before the Nazarene Sanhedrin (better known as the Jerusalem Council) in Acts 15: those who would require full Torah observance as a requirement to being saved. That's a works-based salvation, and is totally anathema to God's Word. It is another gospel, one we reject. We keep Torah because we are saved; we do not keep The Law in order to be saved!

The Cult of Law is not an organized religious group. It is people who take the concept of Torah Observance too far. God's Law becomes an obsession, and by focusing on God's Law and telling people that if you do not accept that the Torah – en toto – is the Law of God that you must live by and if you don't accept that, you will be told by Yeshua to depart from Him, being cast into hellfire! They may pay some lip service to the concept of Salvation by Grace – some will say that Grace saves you, but Torah maintains that salvation – but when you get right down to it, they think the Law is the sine qua non of what it means to be a Believer.

There is a serious line that can be crossed here. This attitude is just a step away from open rejection of the Acts 15 ruling and the concept that people should be growing in their faith walk. As I've said before, I don't know about you, but I don't keep the Commandments perfectly. "But you accept that the Torah is binding upon you!", they say. Yes and no. It is God's Loving Instruction for righteous living, but keeping every jot and tittle to man's satisfaction (let alone God's satisfaction) is not an entrance requirement into the Kingdom. Even if they don't actually say that, people with this attitude are adherents to The Cult of Law.