

1 Timothy 1:8-11

From the book "Take Hold" by Ariel, and D'vorah Berkowitz

"But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed G-d, which was committed to my trust."

Whenever we have written concerning the Torah we have stated that the Torah was given to the Redeemed and describes their intended lifestyle. This passage seems to teach the opposite. Sha'ul (Paul) states that "the law was not made for the righteous..." Should we adjust our position concerning the Torah?

Not at all! The correct understanding of this passage requires noting a subtle difference between two different usages of the word "law" (nomos). The first time it is used is in verse 8, where we read, "But we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully". Here, we can observe two things about the word "law". First, it is used with a definite article ("the") in the Greek. This would imply that the Torah is in view, and not the legalistic concept of "law".

Second, Sha'ul describes the Torah as "good". He says that it is good if it is used properly. What was a proper use of it? Sha'ul's relationship to Timothy can provide a good example of proper usage. As noted above, Sha'ul encouraged Timothy—who was already made righteous through the blood of Messiah—to be circumcised. Moreover, he also writes to Timothy that the Torah (as well as the rest of the TaNaKh) is profitable for, "teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of G-d may be adequate, equipped for every good work". These were, indeed, proper usages of the Torah. The letter to the Galatians is an example of how the Torah can be misused—as a means of attempting to earn or to keep one's salvation. Changing the Torah from G-d's Words of Life to the Redeemed and making it into "law" would be a misuse of Torah. This leads us to the second usage of the word "law". Verse 9 tells us that "law is not made for a righteous man". Here, there is no definite article in the Greek before the word "law". Judging from the previous uses of this grammatical construction, there is good chance that the Torah is not in view here, but that pernicious theological concept called "law". Indeed, "law" is not for righteous people. They have nothing to do with the law. Instead, they have been given the Torah!

On the other hand, sinners are associated with law. Not only do they always approach G-d by means of legalism, but the only things G-d's laws can do for them is to condemn them and point them to Messiah. At that point, G-d's Torah takes over and instructs them in their new identity as new creations constituted in the righteousness of G-d through their new birth.