

Understanding Romans 10:4 in Its Proper Context

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Romans 10 is About Yeshua Being the Messiah

Because so many people have the wrong idea about Romans 10:4, we need to cover this one scripture a little more deeply. We really want the truths of the scriptures and not poor theology. Shaul (Paul) was writing mostly to people who knew how to follow God's commandments and wanted to follow God's commandments. In Romans 10, their zeal needed to be accompanied by faith in Yeshua (Jesus). He is not saying the laws of God are abolished in Romans 10:4. They would not have listened to him at all if he was saying that. Imagine telling someone that was trying to follow God's laws at that time that the Old Testament portion was not to be kept anymore; they were to just believe in this guy who is the messiah. They would probably think you were crazy.

Romans 10 is an appeal to Jews who followed the Torah and the extra commandments¹ to accept their Messiah; that is the context. They understood that when the Messiah came they were to listen to Him; they knew the Torah. "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I order him. Whoever doesn't listen to my words, which he will speak in my name, will have to account for himself to me." Deuteronomy 18:18-19 CJB.

A Little Bit About Romans Chapter 10

Verse 1, Shaul (Paul) expresses a deep desire for Israel.

Verse 2, Israel has zeal, but needs to know more.

Verse 3, God has a way to help Israel to be righteous (righteous means to live right).

Verse 4, the Messiah will help us to live right – a better understanding of the verse.

Verses 5-8, uses a Jewish comparison with Deuteronomy 30:11-16²; the Messiah is here, believe in Him.

Verses 9-10, the Messiah is Yeshua; He is both God and Messiah who was raised from the dead.

Verses 11, says they will not be humiliated for believing in the Messiah.

Verse 13, all who call on Him will be delivered; a reference to Joel 3:5.³

Verse 14, trust in the Messiah.

Verse 15, you've now heard about the Messiah, so believe.

Verse 16, this is the announcement to you about the Messiah, so believe.

Verse 17, again they have heard, so they should trust in the Messiah

Verses 18-21; 11:5, not all have believed, but as in the past, some have endured and believed; all have the choice to believe; that has always been God's way.

Verse 11:1, God has not cast away Israel (They are to be treated with dignity just like anyone else.)

¹ The extra commandments may be helpful at times, but they don't have to be practiced. Some are actually ridiculous. God has always expected mankind to follow His laws and it is for our benefit. Talking about God's commandments: "Therefore, observe them; and follow them; for then all peoples will see you as having wisdom and understanding. When they hear of all these laws, they will say, 'This great nation is surely a wise and understanding people.'" Deuteronomy 4:6 CJB. Keeping God's commandments demonstrates God's love and goodness. I've heard there are some 2 million laws in the USA, yet people put up a fuss over a few hundred biblical commands.

² Deuteronomy 30:11-16 CJB: "For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach. It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, 'Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, 'Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' On the contrary, the word is very close to you—in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it! "Look! I am presenting you today with, on the one hand, life and good; and on the other, death and evil — in that I am ordering you today to love ADONAI your God, to follow his ways, and to obey his mitzvot, regulations and rulings."

³ Joel 3:5 CJB: "At that time, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved. For in Mount Tziyon and Yerushalayim there will be those who escape, as ADONAI has promised; among the survivors will be those whom ADONAI has called."

If the Torah has been done away with in verse 4, the context doesn't make sense. I understand theology has made up some other explanation that is out of true context. Christian theology has dug in their haunches for years saying God's commandments are done away with. That presents a problem because it is clear that Shaul uses the Tanakh (Old Testament portion) in many cases to qualify what he is saying. The next step for Christian theology is to get rid of anything they don't like that the Bible is saying. In some cases, and even in some major denominations this has become true. Shaul says that God is not mocked in one version of the Bible; in the CJB version it says, "Don't delude yourselves: no one makes a fool of God!" Galatians 6:7 (also see verse 8).⁴ The Bible says we will stand before God's judgment seat for the good or bad we have done.⁵ Beware of denominations that teach not to obey God's commandments.

Telos Must be Understood in Context

The Greek word "telos" can be translated end, goal, purpose, or finish line. In order to understand what the word "end" should be in Romans 10:4, we need to understand the context. Since we know the context is about Israel accepting their Messiah, the meaning of telos in Romans 10:4 must be "goal." The CJB version says, "For the Messiah is the goal of the torah for righteousness to everyone that trusts;" Romans 10:4.

Sometimes we can be misled by not knowing the background; in this case the historical setting demanded keeping God's commandments. "Therefore you shall keep My commandments, and perform them: I am the Lord;" Leviticus 22:31 NKJV. Not only that, we need to understand that no one at that time would have considered anyone telling them not to keep God's commandments as being the Messiah or a legitimate Bible teacher.

Definitions of Telos

Here is a definition of telos from antiquity:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telos>:

Telos (from the Greek τέλος for "end", "purpose", or "goal") is an end or purpose, in a fairly constrained sense used by philosophers such as Aristotle. It is the root of the term "teleology", roughly the study of purposiveness, or the study of objects with a view to their aims, purposes, or intentions.

So, in this case, Romans 10:4 could be translated, "the Messiah is the purpose of the Torah toward (eis) righteousness." One of the key words is "eis" in the verse which means toward something. In this case toward righteousness (right living).

Historically

Telos is the "goal" or "finish line" historically. They even have archaeological evidence depicting this struggle toward the "telos," toward the goal in chariot races. In modern vernacular (language) it means the finish line. We should probably then add "finish line" to our definitions of telos.

Strong's Greek Lexicon

Strong's Greek Lexicon says, "5056. telos tel'-os from a primary tello (to set out for a definite point or goal); properly, the point aimed at as a limit."

So it is a point aimed toward, a limit that is aimed at. That fits very closely to the historical definition that I gave you, "finish line."

⁴ "Those who keep sowing in the field of their old nature, in order to meet its demands, will eventually reap ruin; but those who keep sowing in the field of the Spirit will reap from the Spirit everlasting life;" Galatians 6:8 CJB.

⁵ "For we must all appear before the Messiah's court of judgment, where everyone will receive the good or bad consequences of what he did while he was in the body;" 2 Corinthians 5:10 CJB. Notice it says good or bad consequences. Why take chances; why not try to please God? Some say we will only be judged for the good we have done and that's what "bema" in the Greek means. Obviously these people have no idea that the bema is the common Jewish word for where the Torah is read!

Using the Meanings of Telos

What if we use some of these different ideas of “telos” with verses that have telos in them? We come up with some interesting possibilities; **remember telos could mean end, purpose, goal, or finish line:**

Matthew 10:22 NKJV, “And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”

What if we say, “Those who endure to the finish line?” Or, what if we say, “Those who endure to the goal?”

1 Timothy 1:5 NKJV, “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.”

The word “purpose” in the NKJV Bible is the word telos. What if we said “goal” instead of “purpose?” We might come up with, “The goal of following God’s commands is love.”

1 Peter 1:9 CJB, “And you are receiving what your trust is aiming at, namely, your deliverance.” “Aiming” in the CJB Bible is the word telos. It denotes the goal – “Your goal is your deliverance.”

Romans 6:22 NKJV, “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

What if we say, “at the finish line is everlasting life.” Or, perhaps we could say, “The goal is everlasting life.”

2 Corinthians 1:13 NKJV, “For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end.”

If we said, “to the finish line,” it would read that we continue to understand “to the finish line.” Or, maybe we could say, “until the goal is reached.”

Hebrews 3:6 NKJV, “Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”

What if we inserted “finish line” instead of end? It would read, to hold on with hope “to the finish line.”

Revelation 22:12-13 CJB, ““Pay attention!” [says Yeshua,] “I am coming soon, and my rewards are with me to give to each person according to what he has done. I am the 'A' and the 'Z,' the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

If we translate “end” as “finish line” we get that Yeshua is the beginning to the “finish line.” I thought that was interesting. Could Yochanan (John) have been saying Yeshua is our finish line or our goal?

As we can see, even the NKJV Bible renders different meanings for telos. It seems obvious to me that an alternate translation of the word telos can give us a better meaning in some cases.

Using “Goal” in Romans 10:4

The Greek for Romans 10:4⁶

Telos ⁷	gar	nomou ⁸	Cristos	eis	dikaiousuneen	panti	tpsi	pisteuonti
Goal	for	Torah	Messiah	to	righteousness	to everyone	that	believes

⁶ Berry, George Ricker. Interlinear Greek-English New Testament. Romans 10:4. Reprinted Baker Book House. Handy Book Company, Reading, PA. 1997. P. 422. I use the Greek text from his interlinear.

⁷ Telos is the finish line or goal, not to be confused with something that is discontinued.

⁸ Nomou is the word used for Torah by the Septuagint (the Greek Tanakh completed in 132 BCE, Wikipedia - Septuagint) and can be correctly translated Torah.

We translate:

“goal” (context is about accepting the Messiah) instead of “end,”

“Messiah” (Christ means messiah or anointed one) instead of “Christ,” and

“Torah” (“nomou” is Torah in the Greek Old Testament portion, the Septuagint) instead of “law.”

Rearranging the wording we can come up with:

“For Messiah is the goal for Torah to righteousness to everyone that believes.”

In the CJB it says: “For the Messiah is the goal of the torah for righteousness to everyone that trusts.”

Romans 10:4 CJB. As we can see, Stern’s translation is similar and doesn’t say the Torah is abolished as some versions seem to say. This would attract believers to Yeshua in first century, and matches the context of Romans 10 and the historical context. Basically, Shaul is giving reasons for accepting the Messiah in Romans 10. If it says not to follow God’s commandments then the Jewish community at that time wouldn’t have given it the time of day. It’s all about the context. The Greek word “eis” always means motion towards.⁹ We move towards being righteous (to right living) through the Messiah. Righteousness has to do with doing what is right, namely following God’s commandments. God wants to help us live right with the help of the Messiah. There is nothing wrong with that train of thought.

Our Aim is the Finish Line

We are in a struggle to live right. Our aim is the “finish line” just like the chariots participated in a race to get to the goal. Our aim is to live right. It is silly to think that when a person believes in Yeshua that the person has already arrived. We all know that we have to grow up spiritually. There are many theologies out there that push doctrine that negates the commandments of God by their church laws. Yeshua says this is wrong and quotes Isaiah and says, “Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines,” Matthew 15:9 CJB. We are in a struggle to live right with the help of the Messiah. Shaul said we are to put on the new man. We do it with the help of the Messiah. We are to stay faithful and if we sin God will forgive us.¹⁰

Shaul said, “That we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV

We become, we have not arrived. Now each of us must grow and aim (goal or purpose) to live right. Shaul said we are to grow in Ephesians 4:15 CJB, “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in every respect grow up into him who is the head, the Messiah.”

Conclusion

Some mistakenly forget to examine the context of Romans 10:4 which is about Israel accepting their Jewish Messiah. Saying that the Torah is no longer applicable doesn’t fit the context there. By examining what the Greek word telos means and seeing how it can be used in a different ways, we found that an alternate meaning of telos can give us a better understanding of Romans 10:4 that fits the context.

I don’t believe that Christians have reversed the context of Romans 10 to be malicious or be antagonistic to the Jews. It is just the product of many years of Christianity being removed from its Hebraic roots. As we know, Yeshua (Jesus) was Jewish and so were all the early believers in Yeshua. We want biblical truths and not unbiblical concepts. It is biblical truths that can keep us on track spiritually and in a proper relationship with God.

⁹ Bullinger, E.W. A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament. Samuel Bagster and Sons, Limited. London. 1979. P. 808.

¹⁰ “The blood of his Son Yeshua purifies us from all sin ... if we acknowledge our sins, then, since he is trustworthy and just, he will forgive them and purify us from all wrongdoing;” 1 John 1:7,9 CJB.