

*A New Look at the "Fringes" of the Law*

# Are The Old Testament Laws *Still in Force Today?*

What parts of the Old Testament Law are obligatory upon Christians and all people, today? Is any of the law of God "done away" or really "abolished"? What about "animal sacrifices"? Have parts of the Law been temporarily suspended? Why does God condemn those who are "partial in the law"? What is the real difference between the Old and New Covenants? Many are in the process of being deceived concerning God's Law, and the Old and New Covenants, and are in danger of losing out on their salvation, and losing their crown of eternal life! Let's explore these questions, once and for all!

William F. Dankenbring

In the *Worldwide News* published by the Worldwide Church of God, "Personal" from the editor, Joseph Tkach, Jr., or "Little Joe," as some call him, addressed the subject, "Are Old Testament laws still binding on Christians?" In his article he has an interesting, if not correct, approach and answer to the riddle posed by the question in his title. He writes:

"Most of the doctrinal questions revolve around one central question: Are the Old Testament laws still in force?"

"The New Testament gives two basic answers to this question: *Yes, and no* [now isn't that a quaint method of "double-talk"?]. Some verses indicate continuity, and others indicate change. Some verses maintain the validity of the law; others describe it as having been superseded by Christ.

"If we look at one group of verses, we might conclude that we have to keep all OT (Old Testament) laws. If we look at another group of verses, we might conclude that they are all done away. *Both answers have scriptural support and validity.* We need to look at both sides of the question" (*Worldwide News*, Dec.5, 1995).

This is certainly "double talk." To say that the answer to the question, "Are the Old Testament laws still in force?" is both "yes and no" is both fatuous and pointless, adding to the confusion over God's Law in the eyes of millions. It implies that the New Testament contradicts itself by providing contradictory answers. A good scholar, rather than assume certain passages are contradictory, will explore deeper into the question to resolve any superficial evidence or

indication of possible contradiction, and not just make a lame "assumption" or whimsical statement which amounts to specious "double-talk."

Tkach continues his approach as follows:

"Let's start with the emphasis on continuity. A passage like Matthew 5:17-19 can be used to argue that all OT laws are still in force [notice -- he does not bother to quote the passage, but merely alludes to it -- a typical approach of those who don't really want to face the issues squarely but only tangentially]. Jesus didn't do away with any of God's laws. Rather, he emphasized that we ought to obey God not only in our actions, but also in our hearts. We have to keep every OT law *in the spirit, in its attitude and purpose*" (*ibid.*).

What? Did you ever know a "law" that had an "attitude"? I never met one with an "attitude"! This statement sounds like careless writing and thinking on the part of its author. Obviously, no law can have an "attitude," because only living beings can have "attitudes"! But let's go on.

In one line he says "Jesus didn't do away with any of God's laws," and that we "ought to obey God *not only in our actions*, but also in our hearts." This is absolutely *true*, of course. But then he goes on to misconstrue and misinterpret what he has just stated, saying, "We have to keep every OT law *in the spirit, in its attitude and purpose.*" What does that mean? He implies, as we shall see later, that the laws are done away with, literally, but now we just keep them "in spirit" -- that is, *spiritualize them away*, and no longer have to obey them explicitly or in actual fact.

Is *this* what Jesus meant? Tkach merely alludes to Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17, but lets read them completely. Let's read the actual verses, and let them speak for themselves, before we attempt to "pass judgment" on this matter:

### ***A Closer Look at the Law of God***

"Do not think that I came to *destroy* the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to *destroy* but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, *till heaven and earth pass away, ONE JOT OR ONE TITTLE WILL BY NO MEANS PASS FROM THE LAW till all be fulfilled*" (Matt.5:17-18, NKJV).

How do you "spiritualize" away such a plain and obvious statement? In effect, Joe Jr. is saying Christ did not come to *destroy* the Law, but only to *abolish* it! This amounts to nothing less than sheer nonsense -- "double speak" -- "double talk! According to his interpretation, Jesus said not one jot or tittle of the Law will pass away *but it will be "spiritualized away," in a cloud of smoke and mirrors.*

This young teacher who has rejected all the time-honored and proven teachings of his one-time mentor, Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God which he now has the ostensible task of shepherding, goes on to state the following:

"Hebrew 8:10 supports this -- the new covenant means that God's laws are written in our hearts and minds. The laws are internalized, so we, by our nature, want to

keep them. Hebrews 8:10 is a quote of Jeremiah 31:31-33, *we could argue*, [by the way, that's a fact, not an argument -- look it up!] and the laws that Jeremiah meant were the laws that were valid in his day, the old covenant laws. They were all given by God, and if we love him, we will want to keep them.

"For example, our love for God will motivate us to be circumcised [wait a minute! has he forgotten the Paul clearly stated that circumcision is not required for adults upon conversion?], to keep the Jubilee year [what would be wrong with that? It was clearly a commandment -- see Leviticus 25] and sabbatical years [also plain commands of God which were never abrogated or abolished! same chapter]. We will be diligent to avoid all forms of uncleanness [of course! shouldn't we? see Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, where God's laws of clean and unclean foods are spelled out! To disobey them is to invite sickness, disease, plague and ill-health into our lives and pollute the temple of our bodies which God gave us], and we will *wear phylacteries . . .*"

### ***What about "Phylacteries"?***

"Phylacteries"? Where is *this* commanded in the Scriptures? Tkach appears to believe that God commanded His people to wear phylacteries in the Old Testament. But did He?

Wearing phylacteries was a custom of the Jews, but never a clear command in the Scriptures at all! The custom was based on Jewish halakah or rules which were motivated by a particularly stringent interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8 -- "You shall bind them" -- God's commandments -- *as* a sign on your hand, and they shall be *as* frontlets between your eyes." According to the Jewish custom, this verse was used to justify and indeed as evidence that Jewish men were to wear a little box containing certain verses of Scripture between their eyes, on their foreheads, and on their hands. The verses so contained were those immediately preceding this verse -- Deuteronomy 6:4-7. But is this really what God commanded? This verse says we are to bind ALL God's commandments AS signs on our right hands, and AS frontlets between our eyes. Verse 6 reads, "And *these words which I command you THIS DAY shall be IN YOUR HEART*. You shall teach them diligently to your children . . ." That "day" God reiterated the entire book of Deuteronomy, called the "repetition of the law," to the generation that was going into the Promised Land. Those commandments included ALL of the Ten Commandments (see Deut.5:5-22). They also included the laws of unclean meats (Deut.14), the annual Festivals (Deut.16), and the statutes and judgments of God.

Is it therefore *humanly possible* to write down all these laws, which God commanded them that day, and put them in a "box" to wear on the back of their hands, and between their eyes? Of course not! Nor could they literally put these commands "in their heart," in a physical sense -- or else they would have had to surgically operate, remove the tissues surrounding their "heart," and indelibly inscribe all these commands there!

God is not speaking in this verse of "phylacteries" -- not at all. He is speaking of ALL the Law of God being bound up in our hearts and minds, mentally and spiritually, and of them being with us in all our work and activities -- all that our "hand" does -- and between our "eyes" as being always before us, in our line of vision, and never allowed to depart from our sight. We are to understand this command metaphorically, for the command is that the commandments are to be bound *as a sign* -- not literally -- and *as frontlets* -- not like a literal horse's blinders. The word "AS" in this verse qualifies the meaning as being metaphorical, and not literal. The little

boxes called "phylacteries" do not begin to fulfill this command of God -- they do not contain all the words of the Law God gave Israel that day!

However, Joe Tkach is trying to make a point. He is trying to ridicule the concept that all the law of God is in force, today, so he picks on "phylacteries" to show how dubious such a proposition would be. Unfortunately for him, the whole issue of phylacteries is a moot point, because they were not part of the Mosaic law, but an added halakah of the rabbis from a much later period. Jesus Himself, who kept the laws of God perfectly, rebuked the Pharisees, who, He said, "make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments" (Matt.23:5). Jesus did not necessarily condemn the wearing of the phylacteries, but He did condemn their being made "broad" or large and conspicuous. However, they were not commanded in the Law, but were a "tradition of the elders" during the time of Christ -- one which had obviously gotten out of hand.

### *What about Animal Sacrifices?*

Let's go on. Joe Tkach continues:

"... we will wear . . . only pure fabrics [a good practice even today, for health and vitality reasons as well as the lesson of "purity" that it teaches]. We will offer sacrifices, not only for sin but also for fellowship offerings and thank offerings" (*ibid.*).

Now is this really true? Does *anybody* teach -- even those of us who believe Jesus Christ meant precisely what He said, that not a jot or a tittle of the Law has been abolished -- that Christians are therefore to *offer animal sacrifices today*? This kind of "put down" and exaggeration is not helpful in meaningful spiritual dialogue. However, this statement brings up an interesting issue: What if there were a Jewish Temple to be rebuilt? Would it be wrong to offer animal sacrifices, as God commanded in Old Testament times?

The truth is, no sacrifices have been offered by the Jewish people since 70 A.D., when the Temple of God in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans under Titus and Vespasian! In order for animal sacrifices to be offered, there must exist an altar of sacrifice, and a sanctuary or holy place. Since these conditions are not fulfilled at the present time, it is pure ludicrous nonsense for Tkach to insist that Christians must offer animal sacrifices! Where has his understanding gone wrong? Where did he go astray in his thinking?

On the other hand, if a Temple of God did exist, would it be *wrong* for a Christian to offer a sacrifice? What do the Scriptures say about this possibility? No doubt Tkach would hold his hands in unholy horror at the idea, but the apostle Paul himself did that very thing! Notice! When Paul came to Jerusalem in 60 A.D., and met with the headquarters church leaders, including James, the brother of Christ, James told him:

"You see, brother, how many myriads [tens of thousands] of Jews there are who have believed, and they are *ZEALOUS FOR THE LAW* [notice -- this was 30 years after the crucifixion! If the Law had been abolished, they certainly should have realized it by then! But no -- they were zealous for the Law of God -- they knew it had not been destroyed or annulled!] . . ." (Acts 21:20).

James encouraged Paul to go to the Temple, with others in the church who had taken a vow, apparently a Nazarite vow, and who were ending their vow. They were going to the temple to shave their heads and offer the prescribed sacrifices (see Numbers 6). Paul went with them. Many rumors had been circulating about Paul, and some of the brethren thought he was against God's Law. So James encouraged Paul to go with the brethren who had the vow, "that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you *are nothing*, but that you yourself also walk orderly *and keep the law*" (Acts 21:24).

"Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been *purified with them*, entered into the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time *an offering should be made for each one of them*" (verse 26).

Notice, now, how this compares with the Nazarite vow, a voluntary vow which was part of the laws of God given in the days of Moses:

"Now this is the law of the Nazirite; When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And he shall present *his offering* to the LORD; one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering with their drink offerings. . . . This is the law of the Nazarite who vows to the LORD the offering for his separation . . ." (Numbers 6:13-21).

Has this law of God been abolished? If so, then the apostle Paul and those with him in 60 A.D., thirty years after the crucifixion, SINNED! Was Paul ignorant? Was James, the brother of Christ, ignorant? Were they "unaware" that the Law had been abolished, done away, and annulled, as modern mainstream "Christian" preachers allege? Nonsense! I would put far more credence in the words of Paul, and the words of Scripture, and the record of the book of Acts, than in the flimsy theories and useless speculations-suddenly-become-dogmas of modern mainstream religious persons who claim the Law is abolished. "Little Joe" should know better -- but alas, he is now the head of a huge church organization and is leading it in a path 180 degrees opposed to the path its founder followed. He is leading it into utter destruction. The very Law which he says is "destroyed" will destroy him and his followers, unless they repent of their sins against that very Law and the Lawgiver.

### ***"Applied in a spiritual way"?***

Here is more "double-talk" from the master of "double-speak":

"These laws are still valid -- but, as we know, they are applied *in a spiritual way*. The application of the law has been *transformed* by the coming of Jesus Christ" (*Worldwide News, ibid.*).

Here Tkach admits that the Laws of God are "still valid" -- that is, the laws of purity, clean and unclean meats, Jubilee years, Sabbatical years, Sabbaths, Holy Days, sacrifices, etc. -- but he goes on to assert with astonishing nonchalance, that they are applied today "in a spiritual

way" -- whatever that means!

This is dumfounding! How do you apply laws against mixing fabrics "spiritually"? Have you ever seen a spiritual "fabric"? How do you apply the laws against eating pork, shrimp, oysters, crabs, and other unclean things "spiritually"? Do you avoid eating "spiritual pigs," "spiritual crabs," "spiritual shrimp," "spiritual oysters," etc.?

How would one apply the plain spoken seventh year land rest "spiritually"? Have you ever seen or owned any "spiritual land"? And how do you offer "spiritual animal sacrifices"? Ever see a flock of spiritual sheep, or a herd of spiritual cattle? I've heard of "ghost riders in the sky," but that's merely a cowboy western song.

But Tkach says all the Old Testament Laws are done away and now we are only to apply them "spiritually" -- that is, "spiritualize them."

Too bad the apostle Paul didn't understand this! He could have avoided the whole issue of the Nazarite vows, and told the men they were no longer obligated to observe the "Law" anymore. But Paul knew the Law of God was *still in force, and nothing could change it!* Paul knew that God's Law is not abolished -- it will last FOREVER! He wrote, "Wherefore the law IS HOLY, and the commandment HOLY, and just, and good" (Rom.7:12). He also wrote: "Do we then make void the law through faith? GOD FORBID; yea, we *establish the law*" (Rom.3:31).

Joseph Tkach Jr. certainly shows a strange and hostile attitude toward the laws of God. One can only wonder what his true motivation is. However, David wrote of the Law of God, and of those who denigrate it and despise it and who depart from it, in these words:

*"I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law. . . Depart from me you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God! . . . You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood. . . It is time for You to act, O LORD, for they have regarded Your law as VOID. Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold! Therefore ALL your precepts concerning ALL things I consider to be right; I hate every false way. . . I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments. . . Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes. Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law" (Psalm 119:113-136).*

How different, and how refreshing, David's attitude toward God's Law was, compared to that of modern nay-sayers and critics. But David's attitude was amazingly pure and sincere, of whom God said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, *a man after My own heart*, who will do all My will" (Acts 13:22).

Tkach goes on, later in his article:

"If we are always forgiving debts and liberating people from bondage, we do not have to do anything different on sabbatical years. If we are treating our livestock and farmland properly, we do not have to do anything different on sabbatical years.

"If we examine our hearts for corruption and are being cleansed by Jesus Christ, then we do not have to be *fanatical* about destroying houses that have mildew. If our thoughts are pure, we don't have to worry about our fabrics. . . The laws are *VALID*, but the way in which we obey them has been *TRANSFORMED* by the coming of Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*).

What a gargantuan lack of understanding is revealed in these biting words! People are not always forgiving others financial debts -- it very seldom happens. These laws are codified by God to cause society to function with the knowledge that all debts will be automatically either paid off -- or forgiven -- within seven years. Similarly, farm animals (and land) do not need rest every year -- they need a year's rest *every seventh year!* By saying farmers can rest their animals and crops a little every year Tkach shows his gross ignorance of the purpose of this commandment!

Tkach also implies that ancient Israelites were "fanatical" about destroying houses that have mildew. But the Old Testament laws about destroying unclean houses that could not be otherwise rehabilitated merely underscores the seriousness of severe pollution -- the ineradicable kind. God never commanded men to destroy houses with a slight "mildew" problem in the walls. Is Tkach implying here that it is *FANATICAL* for human beings to simply want to obey God?

These words from the pen of "little Joe" Tkach are gobble-de-gook double-talk clap-trap from the puny, scrawny, sorry-looking pugnacious pounder of God's Law! He says the laws of God are "valid, BUT . . ."

There is no "BUT" about it! God's laws are valid, PERIOD! Exclamation point!

But Tkach insists, "But *the way in which we obey them has been TRANSFORMED . . .*" That is, we *no longer obey them in the letter, or according to the plain and simple printed word* - - he says it is all "TRANSFORMED" in some way -- that is, "spiritualized" somehow.

Strange. How do you "spiritualize" a law against murder? Isn't it meant to be taken literally? How do you "spiritualize" a law against stealing? Does that make it all right to steal? How do you "spiritualize" a law against adultery? Does that make *literal adultery all right?*

God wrote these laws for a purpose. He knew that mankind simply *would not forgive debts*, properly, unless there was a LAW specifying how and when debts would be automatically forgiven, and lands redeemed, *if people did not forgive them on their own!* God knew farmers, who can also be greedy and guilty of abusing their land and crops and livestock, would need to give the land and animals a rest every seven years -- *for their own good, as a sabbath rest.* God knew, also, that certain houses, where the walls are *infested with plague*, would be best torn down and destroyed, *to stop the progress of the plague!*

*If your house had rottenness in the walls, and termites have destroyed the foundations and underpinnings, YOU HAD BETTER TEAR IT DOWN physically, or REPAIR THE DAMAGE, IF POSSIBLE, and not assume that you can take care of the problem by "thinking pure thoughts" about it!*

In one sense, though, it is true, that Christ has "transformed" the way in which we are to obey the laws and commandments of God. How is this? It is not by "spiritualizing" it away!

***"He Will EXALT the Law"***

Isaiah the prophet wrote of the coming Messiah, "The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will EXALT THE LAW *and make it honorable*" (Isaiah 42:21). To "exalt" the law does not mean to shoot holes through it, or to destroy it, or to torpedo it, or to weaken, vicerate, vilify, or collapse the law. It means to MAGNIFY, highly esteem, raise to a higher level, EMPOWER, strengthen, and GLORIFY the law!

Jesus raised the Law of God to a higher level. He didn't spiritualize it away, but made its observance a matter of the heart and spirit, and even made it "tougher" to keep, than the mere "letter." For Jesus said:

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'  
But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to *lust* for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. . . .

"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason *except sexual immorality* causes her to commit adultery . . .

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, *do not swear at all* . . .

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile with him, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'  
But I say to you, *love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you*, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matt.5:27-45, NKJV).

Clearly, Jesus did "exalt" and "magnify" the Law of God. He brought out the Law's original *intent*. He went *beyond the letter of the Law*, and in effect made it *far more binding -- even in the heart, intent, and mind!*

***"TRANSFERRED INTO THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION"***

The following quotation is incredible. It is so bad that only a very ignorant person, or an easily duped individual, would believe it. Notice!

"The point is that some OT laws are, in Christian application, *spiritualized*. They are REMOVED FROM THE DIMENSIONS OF SPACE AND TIME and transferred into the SPIRITUAL DIMENSION of attitude and interpersonal relationships."

Thus Tkach removes the laws of God away from the human dimension, including space and time, and relegates them to some other "dimension" -- another "reality" -- which he calls a "spiritual dimension." His meaning is, therefore, that *we no longer need to observe any of these laws in actual fact*, but just be sort of "mentally aware" of them! He puts them in a "box" in some sort of "fourth dimension" where we never need be concerned about them ever again! A neat trick, if he can get away with it! That is just what the devil would like to do -- put God's Laws in a box, and jettison them into another reality, so he can *escape divine judgment!* Isolate them in some "black hole" in outer space, where he never need fear their awesome retribution for disobedience!

Continuing:

"Some people fight against *spiritualizations*. I've heard of one former minister who advocates old covenant customs even to the point that he says Christians should offer animal sacrifices if the temple were still standing! And yet, as far as I know, he does not wear phylacteries or blue threads in tassels on his garments . . .

". . . My main point is that some OT laws are *spiritualized*. . . . However, there are all sorts of opinions out there concerning which laws may be *spiritualized* and which cannot. Some people want physical circumcision. some want land sabbaths. . . . Some want weekly Sabbaths but not annual. Some want new moons. Many different doctrinal packages exist; each person thinks his own is the biblical one and that the others are inconsistent" (*ibid.*).

No doubt there is much controversy over these issues. Whole churches exist, devoted to different interpretations of these matters! Nevertheless, the truth stands secure and firm, and cannot be dislodged. Tkach clearly is of the opinion that some laws are "spiritualized," or done away, and some (like the laws against murder, theft, idolatry, I suppose) are still valid and binding, physically. He then gets to the nitty gritty of his argument:

"The OT clearly commanded the Israelites to wear blue threads in tassels on their garments (Numbers 15:38-39). Was this law inspired by God, or not? Answer: It was. Who has the authority to declare a God-given law obsolete? Answer: Only God.

"Does the New Testament specifically rescind this law? Answer: No. It says nothing about this specific law. Then how can we prove, with divine authority, that it is obsolete? Answer: *Because the New Testament declares the entire old covenant obsolete* (Heb.8:13). As a law code, as a source of laws, it is not valid" (*ibid.*).

Is that the correct answer? Can we prove that "tassels" on our garments, as the Jews wear today on prayer shawls, are obsolete and done away, "because the New Testament declares the entire old covenant obsolete"? Is that what Hebrew 8:13 really says? Let's find out.

### ***"Old Covenant" Versus the "New Covenant"***

We read in Hebrews 8:13:

"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb.8:13, NKJV).

This verse doesn't say anything about tassels or fringes on garments! In fact, all it says is what we already know -- that the Old Covenant as such is obsolete and ready to vanish away. That statement proves *nothing* insofar as the *laws contained in* the Old Covenant are concerned. Lets go back a few verses, and see what was REALLY changed, by the introduction of the New Covenant! Was it the "Laws of God," or something else? Notice!

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because, *FINDING FAULT WITH THEM [that is, the PEOPLE!]*, He says: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a NEW COVENANT with the *house of Israel and with the house of Judah [that is the people of the two nations comprising the tribes of Israel]* -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; *because they did not continue in My covenant [they were rebellious and disobedient, just like many people today!]*, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: *I will put MY LAWS in their mind and WRITE THEM on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be My people*" (Heb. 8:7-10).

Do we see the point? There was nothing wrong with the Laws of the Old Covenant, that God would abolish *any* of them! Rather, the *fault* was with the *people!* They refused to obey God's laws, just like some churches and ministers do, today! The rebellious, carnal human heart has *not changed!* As Paul wrote to the Romans, "Because the *carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be*" (Romans 8:7). As Jeremiah wrote: "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*" (Jer.17:9). The fault was in the people, not the Law of God!

Notice! Jeremiah the prophet wrote:

"For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, *concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.* But this is what I commanded them, saying, *OBEY MY VOICE, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people.* And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.' *Yet they did NOT OBEY or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward*" (Jer.7:22-23).

Obviously, the Old Covenant, at first did not include the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices. These came later and were made part of the Old Covenant, as "amendments" to the constitution, as it were. But when Israel came out of Egypt, God gave them His laws and commandments -- including the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, and statutes and judgments. But He did not command them regarding the sacrificial system of sin offerings, and the sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood. These were added later, because of the disobedience of

the people, to teach them the lesson and habit of obedience! They were added after the children of Israel demonstrated their penchant and proclivity for gross disobedience in the golden calf episode in the wilderness of Sinai!

While the Israelites were still coming out of Egypt, and God had just given them the knowledge of His holy Sabbath day, exactly *one month* after they left Egypt and 20 days before the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, God gave them manna from heaven for six days, and then on the weekly Sabbath He gave them none, having provided a double portion on the sixth day. Yet some of the people disobeyed God, and went out to gather *on the Sabbath* (Exodus 16:25-27). Therefore the Lord said to Moses of the children of Israel, "*How long do you REFUSE TO KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS AND MY LAWS?*" (verse 28). Disobedience was ingrained in the people. They were carnal-minded and naturally hostile towards God's Law. What would the solution to this dilemma be?

The solution, as Paul pointed out in the book of Hebrews, was not a change of the laws, but rather a **CHANGE IN THE HEART OF THE PEOPLE!** God did not do away with His Laws; He instead sent His Holy Spirit, and gave it as a begettal to those who repented of their sins, so it would empower them to OBEY Him (Acts 2:38; 5:32). As Paul wrote, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are IN Christ Jesus, who walk NOT after the flesh, but AFTER THE SPIRIT. For the LAW of the SPIRIT OF LIFE in Christ Jesus *hath made me free from the law of sin and death*" (Romans 8:1-2). The Holy Spirit writes the Laws of God in our hearts and minds. As Paul said, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of POWER, and of LOVE, and of a SOUND MIND" (II Tim.1:7).

Therefore, in truth, none of the "eternal" laws of God are done away. Temporarily, the laws dealing with animal sacrifices have been suspended, as there is no Temple. As Paul also wrote, the Temple and priesthood was "symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience -- concerned only with foods and drinks [food and drink offerings], various washings, and fleshly ordinances [involving the Temple sacrifices and duties] imposed *until the time of reformation*" (Heb.9:9-10).

Christ is the fulfillment of the animal sacrifices. All the animal sacrifices pointed to Him, who was our true "sin offering" (II Cor.5:21), our true "peace offering" (Rom.5:1-2), our true "burnt offering" who gave up His all for us (Heb.10:8-10). Nevertheless, so long as there is a Levitical priesthood -- and the Word of God says it will even last into the Millennial reign of Christ! -- there will be daily offerings, holy day offerings, and a continual round of offerings and sacrifices performed, as an example, reminder, object-lesson and illustration for the people then living of the purpose and plan of God (see Ezekiel 40-48).

### ***Old Testament Laws a "Temporary Package"?***

As if this little Joe Tkach had not gotten into deep enough hot water, Tkach then goes on to argue for what must be his real purpose and belief -- that ALL the Old Testament laws, found in the Old Covenant, are done away, superseded, abolished, replaced by new laws. He asserts:

"This brings us to our second approach to OT law: None of it is valid. Christians

do not have to keep the law of Moses, because *those laws were a temporary package designed only to be in force until the Messiah came.*"

Go back and read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain," "Honor thy father and thy mother," "Thou shalt not murder," "Thou shalt not commit adultery," "Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor," "Thou shalt not covet." Do *any of those laws sound "TEMPORARY"*? Do any of them sound as if they constituted a "temporary package designed only to be in force until the Messiah came"? Falderol and balderdash!

Of course, I left out the fourth commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." That one, of course, he would surely say was "temporary"! Yet the God who gave the weekly Sabbath command, says that the Sabbath is commanded to be observed "throughout your generations" (Exo.31:13), and was instituted as a "sign" between God and His people to be observed "as a *PERPETUAL [eternal] COVENANT*" (Exodus 31:16-17)!

As for the annual Sabbaths, or Holy Days, he would surely say these were temporary, only lasting till the Messiah came. But again we read in the Scriptures God's answer to this Protestant gibberish and heretical malarkey: The Passover was commanded to be observed "as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an *EVERLASTING ORDINANCE*" (Exodus 12:14). The Days of Unleavened Bread were commanded "throughout your generations *as an everlasting ordinance*" (verse 17), "as an ordinance for you and your sons *FOREVER*" (v.24).

Does any of this sound as if it were instituted as a "temporary package"?

What part of the word "FOREVER" does Joseph Tkach Jr. not understand?

The other holy days, too, were ordained *forever* -- Pentecost (Leviticus 23:21), Atonement ("a statute *forever*," verse 31), Tabernacles ("a statute *forever* in your generations," v.41). Tkach's reasoning falls flat.

Tkach adds:

"If we are abiding by the spirit of the law, do we automatically (without any need of a written law) look to a calculated Jewish calendar, based on the agricultural seasons of Palestine, and observe a specific seven days of the year . . .? This is not automatic at all. Rather, it is based exclusively on the *written old covenant.*"

Thus by Tkach's reasoning, the New Covenant does away with the need of all holy days (they are mysteriously "internalized" by being spiritualized and therefore disregarded and ignored). The sacred calendar which God gave His people (Exo.12:1) becomes unnecessary and obsolete. Who needs a calendar, or priests or rabbis who sit in Moses' seat to determine it, if the whole process and entity is "abolished"? Who needs a "calendar" if there are no longer any holy days, "appointed times," weekly Sabbaths, etc.? Apparently to Tkach all days are the same, and there is no such thing as "holy time." In fact, in his eyes the very concept of a calendar appears superfluous and unnecessary!

To the contrary, however, Christ Himself acknowledged that the scribes and Pharisees "sit in Moses' seat." He clearly intimated therefore that they had authority to determine holy calendar, and the time of the holy days, and that *we should "observe and do"* what they told us in this regard (Matt.23:1-3). Since the holy days of God are statutes to be observed *forever*, they are not abolished, even though the Old Covenant is in the process of vanishing away. The holy days of God are perpetuated and observed forever because *they are also part of the NEW COVENANT, written in our hearts and minds!* The fact that they were instituted "forever," as "everlasting" ordinances, and "perpetual statutes" should prove this to us, once and for all!

### ***The Oldest, Dirtiest Little Trick in the Book***

"Spiritualizing" everything away is the oldest trick in the book. Satan the devil used it in the first century, to lead the early church followers into apostasy, which began and was full blown by the days of the apostle Paul (II Thess.2:1-10). It is happening all over again, today, in our generation, before our very eyes. The apostle Paul wrote in warning to our end-time generation, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but, after their own lusts, will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto *fables*" (II Tim.4:3-4).

Paul also warned, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that, in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, *speaking lies in hypocrisy*, having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Tim.4:1-2). Satanic deception will characterize the end of this age. That deception has begun. With a vengeance.

Almighty God warns, "This is a rebellious people, lying children, children who **will not hear the law of the LORD**; who say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things; speak unto us *smooth things*, prophecy *deceits*; Get out of the way, turn aside out of the path" (Isa.30:9-11). Many false prophets and teachers today are doing just that -- to their eternal shame and torment! May God help each one of us to learn the TRUTH about His holy, inviolate, immutable and eternal Law -- and to love it with all our heart!

## Should Christians Wear "Tassels"?

# **A New Look at Biblical "Fringes"**

Most modern Christians would think that wearing "fringes" on their garments, or using prayer shawls with "fringes," would be a ceremonial, ritualistic part of ancient Jewish worship, and has nothing to do with New Testament Christianity. But is this necessarily the case? What is the truth about "fringes," or "tassels"? What are they? Who should wear them, if anybody? Why were they commanded in the first place?

One of the areas of Biblical Law which most Christians reject today is the subject of wearing "fringes" or "tassels" attached to one's garments. Generally speaking, only Orthodox Jews even attempt to follow this Old Testament commandment, today, and most of them seem to disregard the commandment about the "blue" fringes.

In a recent article in the *Pastor General's Report*, Joe Tkach (Junior), or "Little Joe" as some call him, picks on the subject of wearing "tassels" or "fringes" in the garments worn by men. He scorns this Biblical commandment as useless ritualism and worthless works which have been abolished by the New Covenant.

Is this true? Notice what the word of God says about this matter:

"Again, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments *throughout their generations*, and to put a *blue thread in the tassels* of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it *and remember all the commandments of the LORD to do them*, and that you may *not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined*, and that you may *remember and do ALL My commandments, and be HOLY for your God*. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God" (Numbers 15:37-41).

What an interesting commandment! I brought this commandment up in a letter to the then "Radio Church of God," writing to Robert C. Boraker, a writer in their letter answering department in Pasadena, California, in 1957 -- almost 40 years ago! At that time, I also asked many other questions, and this one was conveniently ignored. He obviously did not want to get into it.

But what about this command? Tkach ridicules it as a senseless relic of an old ritual which no longer has any true meaning or significance. But is this true? We are still flesh and blood human beings, just like our ancestors. Many of us believe strongly that we are descended from the "lost ten tribes of Israel," and have amassed impressive evidence to back up that claim (see my articles on "United States in Prophecy," and the book *Tribes*, and *Ephraim*, by Israeli scholar Yair Davidy). Although our ancestors went into captivity centuries and millennia ago, and adopted pagan customs, and pagan religious ideas and holidays, does this mean we have no need to repent, change our wicked ways, and return to the God-ordained customs of our fathers?

#### *The New Testament Witness*

Jesus Christ, or Yeshua Ha Moshiach, was a Jew, and lived a perfect life. He set us an example of how we ought to live, in every way. He was even baptized, setting us an example (Matt.3:13-17). The apostle John tells us: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself to *walk just as He walked*" (I John 2:6). Peter adds that Christ left "us an example, that you should *follow His steps*" (I Pet.2:21).

Did Jesus Christ, our example and pattern for living a holy life, therefore, wear "tassels" or "fringes" in the corners of his garments? That is an interesting question! Let see the answer:

"And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the *hem of His garment*. For she said to herself, 'If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.' But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, 'Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.' And the woman was made well from that hour" (Matt.9:21-22).

The Jewish New Testament, translated by Dr. David Stern, of Jerusalem, makes this passage plain, explaining just what the "hem" of Jesus' garment was. Notice!

"A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years approached him from behind and touched the *tzitzit* on his robe. For she said to herself, 'If I can only touch his robe, I will be healed.' Yeshua turned, saw her, and said, 'Courage, daughter! Your trust has healed you."

The gospel of Mark records the same event, but adds some other noteworthy features to the account:

". . . a large crowd followed, pressing all around him. Among them was a woman who had had an hemorrhage for twelve years and had suffered a great deal under many physicians. She had spent her life savings; yet instead of improving, she had grown worse. She had heard about Yeshua, so she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his robe; for she said, 'If I touch even his clothes, I will be healed.' Instantly the hemorrhaging stopped, and she felt in her body that she had been healed from the disease. At the same time, Yeshua, aware that *power had gone out from him*, turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' His *talmidim* [disciples] responded, 'You see the people pressing in on you; and still you asked, "Who touched me?"' But he kept looking around to see who had done it. The woman, frightened, and trembling, because she knew what had happened to her, came and fell down in front of him and told him the whole truth. 'Daughter,' he said to her, 'your trust has healed you. Go in peace, and be healed of your disease'" (Mark 5:24-34, JNT).

The Jewish New Testament Commentary explains about this passage:

"A woman who had . . . a hemorrhage approached him from behind and . . . touched his *tzitzit*. She was in a state of ritual impurity because of her hemorrhage. She touched the holiest part of Yeshua's garment. No wonder she approached from behind -- she was afraid; this is also why she hesitated to answer Yeshua's question, 'Who touched my clothes?' (Mark 5:29-33). For normally the impure defiles the pure (see Haggai 2:11-13; also the Talmud, *Toharot*). But in this case, the opposite happened: the purity of Yeshua the Messiah and of his *tzitziyot* ["tassels," or "fringes"] remained uncompromised, while instead the cause of the woman's impurity was instantly removed. In the following incident, the raising of the dead girl, this principle is exemplified even more strongly, since Yeshua himself initiates contact with what is regarded in Judaism as the primary source of all impurity, a dead body (v.25) . . ." (comment on Matthew 9:20).

What are these "*tzitziyot*" or "tassels" on the garments of men? David Stern, the author of the Jewish New Testament, explains:

"**Tzitzit** (plural *tzitziyot*). Observant Jewish men in Yeshua's time and today have worn fringes on the corners of their garments, in obedience to Numbers 15:37-41, the third of the three Torah passages recited in the *Sh'ma* portion of the synagogue service. These fringes are made in a special way and have a unique appearance. Their purpose is to remind God's people to obey his commandments. Since they are

not merely decorations, the usual renders of Greek *kraspedon* -- 'hem,' 'fringe,' 'border,' 'tassel' -- are replaced here by '*tzitzit*.' Today Jewish men wear *tzitziyot* on a *tallit gadol* ('large *tallit*'), which is not an article of clothing but a ritual cloth donned primarily for synagogue worship, or on a *tallit katan* ('little *tallit*'), which is an undergarment especially designed with corners for the *tzitziyot*. But Yeshua wore his on his **robe**, a heavy blanket-like over-garment similar to that worn by Bedouins today."

These "tassels" or "fringes" were commanded by God to be worn by His people, to remind them to always keep His commandments. They are in full view, and therefore would be a constant reminder of God's law. Even today you can sometimes see the tassels hanging out over the belts of religious Jewish men who wear a four-cornered undershirt, and pull the tassels to the outside of the garment. These tassels are tied into knots, as a reminder of all 613 of the laws of Moses (of which there are 248 prohibitions or negative commands, and 365 affirmations or positive commands). The numerical value of the letters of the word *tzitzit* is 600; there are eight threads in each "fringe," and five knots; add these all up and you get 613, the number of God's commandments!

### *The Blue Thread*

Each tassel was to have a blue thread. During the Biblical period, blue was probably the most expensive color to produce. Therefore, it was generally reserved for royalty and the very rich. Historically, the only source for the blue was a small gland in the murex snail. It took some 12,000 snails to fill up a thimble of blue dye. In 200 B.C., one pound of cloth dyed blue cost the whopping sum of \$36,000 in terms of today's dollar. By 300 A.D., the cost had soared to a staggering \$96,000. This indicates that Lydia, mentioned in the book of Acts as being a seller of purple, was one very wealthy lady -- perhaps one of the wealthiest in the entire Roman Empire (Acts 16:14).

Why was each tassel inclusive of a blue thread? Of the primary colors, "red" represents man (Adam's name was actually "red," for the red clay from which he was made). "Blue" is the color representative of the heavens, and of God the Father. "Purple," the combination of "red" and "blue," is the color of the Messiah, Yeshua, the coming king. As very God who became very man, He combined the two colors, forming His own color, "purple."

Therefore, for each man of God to have something blue in his tassels, was symbolic of having something of the divine -- a connection with God the Father! This served to remind each person not only of God's commandments, but of their direct connection to God Himself, as their Father and God, as He said: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. I am the LORD your God" (Num.15:41).

Such an expensive and treasured thread of costly blue would probably have been passed down from generation to generation, from father to son as one of his precious legacies.

### *A Symbol of Authority*

The tassels, or fringes, in a man's garment, were symbolical also of his authority. We find an interesting story in the first book of Samuel, where David sneaks up on king Saul in a cave at En Gedi, and cuts off his tassels. Notice the account:

"Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, 'Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi.' Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats. So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs, (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.) Then the men of David said to him, 'This is the day of which the LORD said to you, "Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you."' And David arose and secretly *cut off a corner of Saul's robe*. Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had *cut Saul's robe*. And he said, 'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.' So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul" (I Samuel 24:1-7).

David's heart smote him because he knew that to cut off a king's tassels was tantamount to stealing his authority, emasculating his spiritual connection with God, depriving him of his virility and nobility. At En Gedi, David had literally taken Saul's "authority" and at that point he could probably have seized the kingship over Israel and taken the throne from Saul. But he chose not to do it, but to leave the decision and timing in God's hands. After David prostrated himself before Saul, showing him the tassel he had cut off his robe, explaining he had not killed Saul despite the urging of his men to do so, Saul was impressed with his charity and having his own life spared, and said:

"You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand" (I Samuel 24:17-20).

Another example of the "authority" represented by a man's tassels of his robe is illustrated by the story of Ruth. In chapter three of the book of Ruth, she goes to Boaz, her near kinsman, in the middle of the night, at the threshingfloor, and lays down near him, sleeping at his feet. He awoke with a start, and asked, "Who are you?" Ruth replied:

"I am Ruth thine handmaid: *spread therefore thy skirt* [Hebrew, "corner of thy garment"] over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman" (Ruth 3:9).

The Hebrew word translated "skirt" here is *kanaph* and means "an edge or extremity," "of a garment or bed-clothing." Thus this passage, obscured in most English translations, refers to the tassels or fringes -- the *tzitzit* of Boaz's robe -- being cast over Ruth, symbolizing his taking her under his "authority," as in becoming her husband.

When the woman with the hemorrhage of blood therefore touched the "tassels" of Jesus' garment, she was touching the symbol of His power and authority. He detected it when "power" went out of Him. She was healed by this power, activated by her faith and trust.

### *The Wrong Use of Tzitziyot*

The tassels were commanded by God to be worn by men, to remind them of their connection to Him and of all of His commandments. However, by the time of the end of the second Temple period, and the time of Jesus Christ, the Jews had perverted them into signs of social status. The wealthier you were, the longer your tassels. During the time of Yeshua, the tassels of some of the Pharisees were so long that they dragged on the ground! Yeshua rebuked this ostentatious display of vanity, saying,

"They [the Pharisees] tie heavy loads onto people's shoulders but won't lift a finger to help carry them. Everything they do is done to be *seen by others*; for they make their *t'fillin* [phylacteries] broad and their *tzitziyot* long, they love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and they love being greeted differently in the marketplaces and being called 'Rabbi'" (Matt.23:4-7, JNT).

Some of the Pharisees, like Nicodemus, were good men (John 3). They were not all hypocrites. But those in charge, in Jerusalem, had proven themselves to be vain peacocks, strutting in pride and insolence, refusing to listen to the words of the Messiah, or to accept Him despite all the evidence presented to them. Some of the Pharisees were good and godly men, but others were hypocrites and charlatans, as Jesus noted in Matthew 23.

This passage in Matthew, therefore, should teach us that it is not wrong to wear "tassels" or "fringes" in our garments, like Jesus and the Pharisees did. However, we should not exaggerate them, making them "long," to draw attention to our supposed "holiness." God hates hypocrisy and spiritual vanity!

The lesson for us is that it is most important, in God's sight, that we perform God's commandments and to keep His laws -- including the wearing of prayer shawls at the appropriate times, and the *tzitziyot* -- and to do so from inner conviction and sincerity of heart, in humility and loving obedience to God. We should follow the example of Christ, and the apostles, who did so, "walking in His steps" (I Pet.2:21). We should not be overly concerned with outward "appearances," however, or wear "tassels" to impress others with our religiousness. God looks upon the heart (I Samuel 16:7).

When Joseph Tkach, Jr., ridicules and derides the concept of wearing "tassels" on one's clothing, as God commanded, he may think he is smart and clever and really "sticking it to" those who seek to obey God and follow His laws with their whole heart. But he is in reality only condemning himself, and those who follow him, to spiritual poverty, being cut off from God, having lost all their own supposed vaunted "authority" in His eyes. They reject His Law -- He rejects them! It is that simple. No amount of explaining or "spiritualizing" will negate this fact.

God thunders in the book of Hosea,

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have *rejected knowledge*, I also will **REJECT YOU** from being priest for Me; because you have **FORGOTTEN THE LAW OF YOUR GOD**, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6).

God thunders through the prophet Malachi:

"And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to My name,' says the LORD of hosts, I will send a CURSE upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your descendants, and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of *your* solemn feasts . . . .

For the lips of a priest *should keep knowledge*, and people should seek the LAW at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. *But you have departed from the way; you have caused MANY to STUMBLE AT THE LAW*. You have CORRUPTED THE COVENANT [teaching a false "New Covenant" which God never made!] of Levi,' says the LORD of hosts. Therefore, I also have made you *contemptible and base* before all the people. Because you have not kept My ways, but have *SHOWN PARTIALITY IN THE LAW*" (Malachi 2:1-9, NKJV).

What about you? Where do you stand regarding the Laws of God? Will you follow those false teachers, those pseudo-priests, who have forsaken the truth of God, and plunged madly into a course of wickedness which will not be abated until the full wrath of God is poured out upon them? Black oblivion awaits those who forsake the laws and commandments of God -- including the commandments concerning the "tassels" or "fringes." Make no mistake. God will NOT be mocked. They have sown the wind of false doctrine; they will reap the whirlwind.