

# Paul's Use of Nomos

This article is written for those who understand that the primary meaning of nomos is a norm, and how to apply this in Paul. [The Good News of Messiah](#) translation (GNM) frequently translates “norm” instead of “Law” (Torah).

First “norm” is the first definition in the standard Greek lexicon, BDAG 3rd edition. The documentation is here: [Greek Word Index](#).

Now to comprehend Paul's use of nomos we have to realize a difference between it and the meaning of the word Law or Torah. The word nomos has a connotation that law does not have. Generally one thinks of law as unitary and monolithic if they are Jewish, or see law in that sense as it has influenced the usage of the western world. What nomos connotes is law in the normal sense. Nomos is the norm of law. This connotation can be tagged on like this: nomos = “the norm of Law” or “the norm of Torah.” The thing is that the Greek language actually brings this sense to the meaning of the word.

Most of the time Paul is referring to Torah or “The Law” when he uses nomos with the meaning of the norm. But he just does not mean Torah in the general sense. He means the norm of it. Torah contains norms and exceptions to norms. The norm of something is that which is usually applied, usually practiced, or customarily carried out. A norm refers to a standard or rule. But it also connotes very strongly in Greek that it is the standard that applied in most cases.

So usually, when I translate “norm” I mean the legal norm or the norm of Torah. In this sense the nomos is still Torah, but the word is suggesting the part of Torah that customarily applies to mankind. The English “law” lacks this. If I were to say in English, you do not have to follow the law here, then I am a lawbreaker, but if I say to a Greek I do not have to follow the nomos here, he understands that I mean the norm of the law and that there must be some legal exception that applies to me. Or if I say that YHWH's instruction (Torah) does not apply to me, then I am a covenant breaker. But if I say that YHWH's norm does not apply to me, then one can understand that YHWH has an exception that is not the norm, but still is a perfectly legal exception. It is this simple connotation, or actually denotation in Greek that is lost in the translation of “Law” or “Torah.” Nomos can even mean a customary habit that is not a legislated law, or someone's usual tradition. Rarely does Paul use it this way. There are a few cases. Romans 7:21 comes to mind. The rest of the time he means “Torah” (Law) or the norm of Torah. So Paul's nomos is mostly still Torah. It is just the norm of it, even in most of the passages people think are anti-Torah. However, when one brings the sense of norm implicit in the Greek back to the English translation, the problems go away.

Here are some examples:

But now apart from the norm, the justice of the Almighty is made visible, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (Romans 3:21, GNM).

The normal justice of the Torah is that the sinner should die for their own sins. The sinner is to pay the penalty of eternal condemnation for transgression. The penalty for setting aside the Torah is to become accursed! So Paul is saying that Yahweh has a means of justice this is not according to the norm, but nevertheless, it is explained and included in the Torah and Prophets. The exception to the norm comes by the provision of Messiah to pay the penalty for our sins by dying and rising on the third day. This is the

testimony of the Law and Prophets. One could read the text: apart from [the legal] norm [of Torah]. Another important point is that the word “justice” is the primary meaning of the text. It connects with “righteousness” in the sense that Yahweh is doing “righteousness” in his judgments. Paul is not referring to personal righteousness as apart from the norm. For personal righteousness we must obey the Torah. However, there is a sense where in Messiah that righteousness may also be apart from the norm of Torah, at least as it applies to most people. People obeying Torah on their own power cannot achieve any exceptional righteousness. However, those obeying in the power of the Spirit can exceed the norm of Torah as practiced by most. This meaning, however, is an advanced one, and is not the primary emphasis of Paul in the context of this verse. The normal Greek reader would understand the words δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as “the justice of God.” The sense is Yahweh’s judicial practice in judgment with respect to the world vs. is exceptional judicial practice with respect to those in Messiah.

Another text where this comes out clearly is Romans 10:4:

For Messiah is the end of the norm for justice to everyone trustingly faithful.

Again, Paul is teaching the same thing. The faithful (who trust and repent) are given the gift of having justice satisfied by Messiah on the cross. The penalty for the repentant falls on him. So the repentant transgressor does not have to die eternally.

I should remind the reader that the meaning of *nomos* used “norm” is found in several different Greek Lexicons (BDAG 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition), and in other sources, and is acknowledged by scholars of the subject. I provided a link to the sources above. I should also point out that the introduction to the definition in BDAG, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, takes up the very matter of the misuse of *nomos* by anti-nomian commentators in New Testament Studies.

Here is another example of Paul teaching the same thing:

I am not setting aside the loving kindness of the Almighty. For if justice is [*administered*] through the [*legal*] norm, then Messiah died needlessly (Gal. 2:21, GNM).

The legal norm or the norm of Torah is that the soul who transgresses shall die. However, if that soul repents and turns from the sins of his fathers, then the legal exception will apply and he will live. If there is no exception to the norm of death, then Messiah died in vain. But thanks be to the Almighty, Messiah provides the legal exception to the norm.

These corrections are applied in the Good News of Messiah translation. It can be previewed here at this [link](#).

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