

# 1 Corinthians 14:21 in the Navajo Bible

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Diyin God bibee haz'aanii bee ak'e'ashchįgo kóní: Bóhólníhii ání, Náánáta' dine'é dabizaad bee díí dine'é bich'į' hadeesdzih. Ákondi doo dashįshts'ąą' da doo. (1 Corinthians 14:21)<sup>1</sup>

In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me[.]" (1 Corinthians 14:21)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

The quotation Paul is introducing here actually comes from the book of Isaiah (28:11-12), not from one of the five books of Moses, but in the Greek he uses words that are correctly translated, "In the law it is written" (NIV, above). When he says this, his intent is, "In the Old Testament it is written." In the Navajo the words *Diyin God* ("God") are added – thus, "In the law [of God] it is written."

American Bible Society versions of the New Testament frequently add words when Paul, or other writers, use the word "law." Paul uses the word "law" in a variety of ways. Some might find his terms confusing, but my position is that a translation should only be as clear as its source. Once we start going beyond our sources we are in uncharted waters. There's a fine line here between enough and too much. Yes, a translation should be clear, but any ambiguity in the original should be allowed to flow through in the translation.

In the present case (1 Corinthians 14:21) I have no problem with saying, "In the law [of God] it is written," but at the end of the day it is not necessary to add such clarifications and when we look back and pull together all the passages where they occur, the net result is a muddle of confusion. There is no need to add words such as, "of God," "of Moses," "Jewish," or whatever, to what was actually written down.

## Stylistic Additions

In table 2 (below), I bring together all the passages in Paul's writings where we find some form of the Greek word *nomos* ("law"). In a majority of these passages the translators add nothing to the text. This is the right way. In others, they add words which may or not correspond perfectly to Paul's intent. In table 1 we have a summary of the

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<sup>1</sup> Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> English Bible quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

verses where stylistic additions are made to the text in connection with the word "law." In tables 2 and 3 I show where the information summarized in table 1 comes from.

Notice that a verse can occur in more than one table (e.g., see Romans 2:12, 14, 15, 17, 25; 5:13; Galatians 2:16, 19). This is because a verse can contain more than one example of the word in question.

Table 1  
"Law" in the Writings of Paul  
(Summary)

No Words Added	Law [of Moses]	Law [of God]	[Jewish] Law
68 verses, 82 exx.	20 examples	4 examples	8 examples
72.0%	17.7%	3.5%	7.0%

Table 2  
"Law" in the Writings of Paul: Nothing  
Added in Navajo

No Words Added
Rom 2:12, 12, 13, 13, 14, 14, 14, 15, 18, 20, 23, 25, 27
Rom 3:20, 21, 27, 31
Rom 4:13, 14, 15, 16
Rom 5:13
Rom 7:1, 1, 5, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 16, 22, 23, 23, 23, 25, 25
Rom 8:2, 2, 4, 7
Rom 9:31
Rom 10:5
Rom 13:8, 10
1 Cor 9:8, 9, 20, 21
1 Cor 15:56
Gal 2:16, 16, 18, 19, 21
Gal 3:5, 11, 12, 13, 18, 21, 21, 21, 23, 24, 25
Gal 4:4, 5, 21
Gal 5:3, 4, 14, 23
Gal 6:2, 13
Phil 3:9
1 Tim 1:7, 8, 9
68 verses, 82 examples

Table 3  
 "Law" in the Writings of Paul: Three  
 Added Terms in Navajo

Law [of Moses]	Law [of God]	[Jewish] Law
Rom 2:12, 14, 15, 17, 25	Rom 5:13, 20	Gal 2:16, 19
Rom 3:19, 28	Rom 9:4	Gal 3:2, 19
Rom 4:15	1 Cor 14:21	Gal 4:21
Rom 5:13		Gal 5:18
Rom 6:14, 15		Eph 2:15
Rom 7:4		Phil 3:5
Rom 8:3		
Rom 10:4		
1 Cor 9:20, 21		
1 Cor 14:34		
Gal 3:10, 17		
Titus 3:9		
20 examples	4 examples	8 examples

## Other Textual Adjustments

If one deviates from the text, there are only so many ways to do it. One can put something in (additions), leave something out (omissions), or substitute another term. We have already discussed cases where words have been added to clarify a writer's intended meaning. Below we consider cases where words are either left out or substituted. This is not always a bad thing. Sometimes it is necessary to make adjustments to convey a thought accurately. So we need to come down to cases.

### Stylistic omissions

In some cases the translators find *nomos* ("law") in the Greek but offer no corresponding word in Navajo. This is a stylistic omission. It is ordinarily done in such a way that context fills in any gaps. Romans 7:21 provides an example.<sup>3</sup>

In Romans 7:21 the word "law" is used in the sense of something that happens consistently, something a person can notice by observation. In Navajo no corresponding term is used, but we still get the same thought from the opening words, *Jo, kónisht'éego ádaa ákonisdzin* ("This is what I've noticed about myself").

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. (Romans 7:21)

*Jo, kónisht'éego ádaa ákonisdzin* [This is what I've noticed about myself], *yá'át'éhígi ádeeshnít'í niisijh nidi baahági át'éii t'áa álahji' shidáahgi hóló.* (Romans 7:21)

<sup>3</sup> See also Gal 2:19, 21.

The stylistic omission here is that nothing in the Navajo version directly corresponds to the word "law," although the intent comes through clearly enough.

### Stylistic substitutions

Occasionally the translators find *nomos* ("law") in the Greek but use another expression (something other than *bee haz'áanii*) in Navajo. This is an entirely normal part of translating. See 1 Corinthians 6:6 and Ephesians 2:15.

In 1 Corinthians 6:6 the Navajo translators say "judge" (*áníhwii'aahii nilíinii*) instead of "law." And this is the sense of the passage. In English, going to law means taking someone before a judge. So the difference does not have to do with changing meanings, but with preserving them. The correspondence between the English word "law" and the Navajo term *bee haz'áanii* is not exact – something that occurs routinely when comparing languages.

But instead, one brother goes to law against another- and this in front of unbelievers!  
(1 Corinthians 6:6)

Nídi oodlání nohíigo éí doo oodlání ánihwii'aahii nilíinii nááná'la' oodlání nilíinii  
nihá yaa nídoót'íígo biniyé bich'í' nidahoh'éésh. (1 Corinthians 6:6)

In Ephesians 2:15 let numbers in square brackets serve, not to identify terms (I've been used letters in square brackets for that), but to identify clauses. The word "law" is used in NIV, but in Navajo the sense given is "customs" (*bik'eh ó'oo'níitii*), and more specifically "Jewish customs" (*Jew dine'é bibik'eh ó'oo'níitii*). That's what Paul was talking about. The passage is handled well.

[1] [B]y abolishing in his flesh [2] the law with its commandments and regulations. [3] His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace[.]  
(Ephesians 2:15)

[2] J6, Jew dine'é bibik'eh ó'oo'níitii biyi' bik'eh hoogáa'ii bee ak'e'diniihii át'éego [1]  
Christ dadziztsánígíí bee also nizhnú't'i', [3] áko Jew dine'é danilíinii áádóó doo Jew  
dine'é danilíinii t'áá hó hwee t'áá'á'í dine'é ániidíii ájii'laa, kót'éego hózhó náhásdlíí'.  
(Ephesians 2:15)

In Romans 7:8-9, two different terms are used in English ("commandment," "law"; Greek *entolē, nomos*), but only one term is used in Navajo (*bee haz'áanii*). In English the sequence is (1a) "commandment," (2a) "law," (2b) "law," and (1b) "commandment"; in Navajo we have *bee haz'áanii* all four times. No problem here. The meaning is the same.

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by [1a] the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from [2a] law, sin is dead. 9 Once I was alive apart from [2b] law; but when [1b] the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.  
(Romans 7:8-9)

[1a] Bee haz'áanii ánínígíí baa ákoniizíí'go baaḥági át'éii bee adáhonooní haa shíí néeláá' shii' héetgo áyiilaa. Háálá [2a] bee haz'áanii doo shíí bééhózindáá' doo baaḥági ásh't'íí da nisin nít'ée'. 9 [2b] Bee haz'áanii ánínígíí lah doo baa ákonisingóó hinishná nisin nít'ée', nidi [1b] bee haz'áanii baa ákoniizíí'go baaḥági ánisht'éhígíí ałdó' baa ákoniizíí', áko t'óó bik'ee dasétsá. (Romans 7:8-9)

## Two final verses

In 1 Corinthians 9:20 there is some clause inversion, but all the parts and pieces are there when the passage is examined closely. I'm going to quote this verse twice – once to show how the clauses correspond in English and Navajo, and once to show how the terms we're interested in correspond with each other. First, we use numbers in square brackets to identify clauses.

[1] To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. [2] To those under the law I became like one under the law [3] (though I myself am not under the law), [4] so as to win those under the law. (1 Corinthians 9:20)

[1] Jew dine'é éí Christ deidoodłaałgo bini' bá ádashłééh biniyé t'áá bígi át'éego í'diishyaa; [3] azhá shí bee haz'áanii Mózes baa deet'áanii doo yiyaa naatłizhii nishłíí da nidi, [2a] éí bee haz'áanii yiyaa nandeehígíí [4] Christ deidoodłaałgo bini' bá ádashłééh biniyé [2b] t'áá bígi át'éego í'diishyaa. (1 Corinthians 9:20)

Above we focus on clause order. The English order 1 2 3 4 becomes the Navajo order 1 3 2a 4 2b. Both translations are idiomatic representations of the Greek. Now we look at the way terms correspond to each other. The word "law" occurs four times in English, three times in Navajo.

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under [a] the law I became like one under [b] the law (though I myself am not under [c] the law), so as to win those under [d] the law. (1 Corinthians 9:20)

Jew dine'é éí Christ deidoodłaałgo bini' bá ádashłééh biniyé t'áá bígi át'éego í'diishyaa; azhá shí [c] bee haz'áanii Mózes baa deet'áanii doo yiyaa naatłizhii nishłíí da nidi, éí [d] bee haz'áanii yiyaa nandeehígíí Christ deidoodłaałgo bini' bá ádashłééh biniyé [b] t'áá bígi át'éego í'diishyaa. (1 Corinthians 9:20)

Up to this point we've been discussing vs. 20. Now consider vs. 21. In this case also I quote the verse twice – once to show its sequence of clauses, once to show its sequence of terms.

[1] To those not having the law [2] I became like one not having the law [3] (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), [4] so as to win those not having the law. (1 Corinthians 9:21)

[1] Doo Jew dine'é danilíinii éí bee haz'ánígíí doo yiyaa sinilii, [4] Christ deidoodłaałgo bini' bá ádashłééh biniyé [2] t'áá bígi át'éego í'diishyaa. [3] Jó, bee

haz'áanii Mózés baa deet'áanii shee hóló, nidi Christ yee has'áanii t'áá aaníí biyaa naashtłizh. (1 Corinthians 9:21)

In regard to clauses, the English order 1 2 3 4 becomes the Navajo order 1 4 2 3. Again, this is an idiomatic use of the language. In regard to terms and how they the two translations use them, the situation in 1 Corinthians 9:21 is a bit more challenging. There are five examples of the word "law" in English, four examples of the corresponding term in Navajo.

To those not having [a] the law I became like one not having [b] the law (though I am not free from [c] God's law but am under [d] Christ's law), so as to win those not having [e] the law. (1 Corinthians 9:21)

Doo Jew dine'é danilíinii éí [a] bee haz'ánígíí doo yiyaa sinilii, Christ deidoodlaałgo bini' bá ádashlééh biniyé [b] t'áá bígi át'éego í'diishyaa. Jó, bee haz'áanii [c] Mózés baa deet'áanii shee hóló, nidi [d] Christ yee has'áanii t'áá aaníí biyaa naashtłizh. (1 Corinthians 9:21)

Here the terms occur in the same sequence, and there is something in four cases that we can point to as a correspondence. The fifth example does not occur in Navajo. (This is a stylistic omission.) So far, so good. But look at term (c). Where the English says "without God's law" (Greek *anomos theou*), the Navajo says "without the law of Moses." Elsewhere the Navajo Bible maintains a careful distinction between the "law [of Moses]" and "law [of God]," so this discrepancy is puzzling. The sentence structure in 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 is quite complex. I don't envy the translators for having to wrestle with its difficulties. But in vs. 21 it seems that the two translations are conveying not just different stylistic approaches to the text, but different information.

## Conclusion

I don't see the occasional stylistic omission or substitution as a problem, although 1 Corinthians 9:21 is something we might want to discuss further. More significant is the semi-systematic addition of words such as "of Moses," "of God," and "Jewish" in a substantial minority of passages where the word "law" is used, even where such additions might prove correct. These are not exceptions, but instead form a new pattern of their own.

In 71.7% of all verses which use a form of the Greek word *nomos* ("law") nothing is added in the Navajo. In 17.7% of all cases the words *Mózés baa deet'áanii* ("of Moses") are added. In 3.5% of the verses the words *Diyin God bi-* ("of God") are added. And in 7.1% of cases, the word *Jew dine'é bi-* ("Jewish") is added.

The numbers reported in table 1 (above) do not tell the whole story, however, because in many passages the absence of added words resembles a stylistic omission. The added meaning is clear from a context created by terms that have been added in nearby verses, such that the addition need not be repeated in order to be understood. The result is that it's not possible for a casual reader to know when Paul really does say "law of Moses" (see 1 Corinthians 9:9) or "law of God" (see Romans 7:22, 25; 8:7;

1 Corinthians 9:21) and when he's being helped along by well meaning additions to the text that may or may not convey the right thought.

## Addendum

There are a handful of other stylistic additions in the writings of Paul that are not covered in what I have said so far. There is no systematic way to search for them. One of these is Galatians 2:4,<sup>4</sup> which in English says, "*This matter arose* because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves." Here's the verse in Navajo:

[N]ít'ée' ła' diné ałk'isóó ádahodil'íinii t'áadoo baa ákodaniidz'íí yah aheeskai lá. Éí Christ Cjesus binahji' nihá honídee'ígíí hadeidoosił binié naalch'íí k'ehgo t'áá nahonit'ínee yah aheeskai lá. Éí Jew dine'é bibee haz'áanii biyaa ninádíníidahgo binaalte' nídazhdoodleł danihó'ní. (Galatians 2:4)

What the Navajo says is, "to make us slaves [to the Jewish law]." This is undoubtedly Paul's intent, but we need to bear in mind what Jewish law he was talking about. What he was talking about throughout this passage, and in many of his other letters, was circumcision. He was not talking about Sabbath keeping. Circumcision could truly be called a Jewish law, because it set the Jews apart from all other nations. We might want to say the Sabbath did this too, but that is not the case. The Sabbath was instituted in Eden and therefore applies to those who descend from Adam, not Abraham, whether they keep it or not. Many don't keep the Sabbath, but this does not mean it was not made with them in mind. See Genesis 2:1-4.

Jesus says, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). This would have been the perfect place for Jesus to say, The Sabbath was made for Jews, not Jews for the Sabbath. But He doesn't say it that way. It was not made for Jews; it was made for "man" – i.e., mankind, all of mankind. It was made for every people group, for every human being.

Again, the Sabbath cannot be what Paul has in mind here because it has to do with resting. Slavery has to do with working. These two ideas are opposites of each other. Saying, Take a day off, is not the same as saying, Work! (Next Monday morning when you arrive at work, take a moment to reflect back on what I'm saying.) So the passage is true as Paul wrote it, and the translation does not change Paul's intent, but we have to know what his intent was or we could draw wrong conclusions based on our own presuppositions.

Today people are obsessed with the idea that Sabbath keeping is work – not because it's hard to rest, but because resting in this way is something they don't want to do. If this is really true – if resting in this way is something you don't want to do – you should ask yourself how your relationship with Jesus is going. If you're a Christian, but it's hard to make yourself spend a day with Jesus, something is wrong.

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<sup>4</sup> See also Gal 2:12.