

Torah Observant
“SHOMER MITZVOT”

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

Grafted into Isra'el
A Short Commentary

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

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Nearly 1900 years ago, the Apostle Paul (a.k.a. Rav Sha'ul) found himself being challenged by the risen Yeshua on a most important mission. Our LORD chose to commission this Pharisaic Jew with an urgent message to the Gentiles:

“However, to those of you who are Gentiles I say this: since I myself am an emissary sent to the Gentiles, I make known the importance of my work... But if some of the branches were broken off, and you - a wild olive - were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.”
(Romans 11:13, 17, 18, CJB)

A most wonderful truth is being discussed here. What does it mean for Sha'ul to say that the ‘wild olive tree’ (the Gentiles) is grafted into the ‘cultivated olive tree’? The plain sense of the text is not easily confused:

- Through the efficacious ministry of the Messiah Yeshua, Gentile believers are covenant-bound to ‘Father Abraham’s Olive Tree’—Isra'el—thereby making them fellow citizens and full-participants with the Commonwealth of Isra'el (Eph. 2), thus granting them the divine privilege of following the whole of the Torah.
- We believe that YHVH has written this very same Torah upon the hearts of those, Jews and Gentiles, who have placed their trusting faithfulness in Yeshua (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-12).
- We believe that this same Torah is a foundational revelation of the righteousness of HaShem and serves as a description (along with the rest of the Scriptures) of the lifestyle of the Redeemed Community (James 1:16-27).

- Furthermore, 'grafted in' bespeaks of our affirmation to our true identity as a people—Jew and Gentile—that is securely rooted in the Finished Work of Yeshua HaMashiach.

The Righteousness of God

In his letter to Rome, Sha'ul wrote in 3:28 that a person is considered righteous by God on the grounds of trusting which has nothing to do with the Torah (or as in KJV "deeds of the law"). On the surface this seems problematic for my own teachings that consider Torah observance to be of great significance. Yet, the problem here is really more a matter of hermeneutics than of theology. What Sha'ul is really talking about when he employs the Greek phrase "ergon nomos", translated here as "works of Law" is in actuality a technical phrase that the Judaisms of Sha'ul's day employed to speak of the halakhah, that is, the proper way in which a Jew is to walk out Torah. Indeed, the prevailing view of the sages of the 1st Century held to the common belief that Isra'el and Isra'el alone shared a place in the world to come. Thus, if a non-Jew wished to enter into HaShem's blessings and promises, such a person had to convert to Judaism first. To be sure, this is one of the primary arguments delineated in the letter to the Galatians.

But for Sha'ul no such 'man-made' conversion policy existed in Scripture!

By contrast, Sha'ul taught most assuredly that Gentiles were grafted into Isra'el the same way that Avraham was counted as righteous by God in B'resheet (Genesis) chapter 15: faith in the promised Word of the LORD. Thus, the phrase "works of Law" has a Hebrew counterpart: ma'asei haTorah. What meaneth ma'asei haTorah? The Dead Sea Scrolls used this phrase as well, and since the discovery of those manuscripts we have now come to know that it refers to "some of the precepts of the Torah", as adjudicated by the halakhah and by the particular community wielding the most influence. To be sure, the halakhah that teaches Gentile inclusion only by way of conversion (read most often as "circumcision" in Galatians) was naturally at odds with the True Gospel of Gentile inclusion by faith in Yeshua plus nothing! If we understand that quite often Sha'ul's use of the term circumcision in Galatians is actually shorthand for "the man-made ritual that seeks to turn Gentiles into Jews" then the letter begins to make more sense Hebraically and contextually.

With this knowledge at hand we are now prepared to better interpret Sha'ul's pasuk, *"a person is considered righteous by God on the grounds of trusting which has nothing to do with the Torah..."* as really saying, *"a person is considered righteous by God on the grounds of trusting which has nothing to do with the conversion policy that seeks to make Gentiles into Jews first!"*

Law vs. Grace?

God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles! One need not change his station in life before God can accept him. What is more, the real change that takes place in a person's life is effected by the Ruach HaKodesh when, because of Yeshua's bloody, sacrificial death, the sinner takes on the status of righteous! Man cannot add to that which God perfects. A conversion to Judaism (a.k.a. circumcision), in Sha'ul's mind, added nothing to those wishing to be counted as true Israelites in the Torah Community. To Sha'ul, their genuine faith in the Promised Word of HaShem, as evidenced by the genuine working of the Spirit among them, was all the "identity" they would ever need! Once counted as righteous by the Righteous One Himself, all the new [Gentile] believer needed to do was begin to walk in that righteousness, a walk already described in the pages of the Written Torah, a walk formerly impossible due to the deadness of flesh and bondage to sin.

Biblical "freedom" is not a license to walk away from Torah! Biblical "freedom" is liberation to walk into Torah and into the righteous that HaShem envisioned for us all along! Thus, positional righteousness always results in behavioral righteousness. Put plainly, Torah submissiveness is the natural result of being set free from sin and set free unto Yeshua!

The ages-old "Law vs. Grace" argument is a dead argument. Truthfully, there exists no incongruity between God's Law and God's Grace. The two are complimentary. To be sure, God's grace is what actually empowers the saint to walk into Torah obedience!

Conclusion

Failure to continue in genuine trusting faithfulness for either Jew or Gentile participants invited God to place them in a position that Sha'ul called "broken off". In other words, natural branches (Jews) could be broken off because of lack of trust, and grafted-in branches (Gentiles) could also be broken off due to lack of trust (read Romans chapter 11)! Far from purporting that some "ethnic-driven" halakhah secured one's place in the 'olam haba (Age to Come), the native born Jew, the convert Jew, and the good old fashioned Gentiles all faced the same penalty for remorseless lack of faith: spiritual death.

So we see that the Torah is the universal document for both peoples and it outlines God's plan for all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles.

The "mystery of the Gospel" is that Isra'el is actually comprised of both Jews and Gentiles! To be grafted into the family of God is to join oneself to a Jewish Olive Tree without having to succumb to any kind of man-made conversion policy whatsoever! To this end, one becomes submissive to the instructions and righteousness of God, and inherits the blessings of God, whether he is of Gentile or Jewish stock!

To walk in disobedience and lack of trust is to invite God's punishment and withholding of blessing. To belong to the family is to mentally, spiritually, and physically accept the family rules. To this end, both Jews and Gentiles are expected to practice Torah submissiveness within their hearts and within their communities. To submit to God is to desire and allow his Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) to continually mold a person's life into the example of the Son of God, who vividly displayed a Torah-obedient and submissive life! This is the responsibility of a believer.

To suppose that faith outside of resulting action alone is pleasing to God is to misunderstand the valuable lesson explained by Ya'akov. Such faith is barren and of no value to God. Conversely, to mistakenly replace the genuine faith that the Torah teaches with halakhic rules designed to regulate one's identity with God, is to misunderstand Rav Sha'ul's valuable lesson. Such actions also prove to be displeasing to God and unacceptable as righteous.

Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman yeshua613@hotmail.com