

# Torah Observant "SHOMER MITZVOT"

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)  
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**"Trust and Obey for There's No Other Way..."** (Recalling the old, familiar Baptist tune...)

Being declared righteous by HaShem is the goal of all men who seek HaShem. Righteousness can be defined in two ways: "behavioral righteousness", actually doing what is right, and "forensic righteousness", being regarded as righteous in the sense (a) that HaShem has cleared him of guilt for past sins, and (b) that HaShem has given him a new human nature inclined to obey HaShem rather than rebel against him as before.

It all boils down to the evangelical notion of justification and sanctification. Webster's defines the word 'justify' thusly:

**1 a** : to prove or show to be just, right, or reasonable **b** (1) : to show to have had a sufficient legal reason (2) : to qualify (oneself) as a surety by taking oath to the ownership of sufficient property.  
**2 a** archaic : to administer **justice** to **b** archaic : **ABSOLVE** **c** : to judge, regard, or treat as righteous and worthy of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Millard Erickson stated, "Sanctification is a process by which one's moral condition is brought into conformity with one's legal status before God."<sup>2</sup>

I want to demonstrate a good biblical view of trust and obedience by examining two of the New Testament's better known, yet seemingly opposing authors: Rav Sha'ul (Apostle Paul) and Ya'akov haTzaddik (James the Just). The former wrote some 13 or possibly 14 letters to the believing communities of his day; the latter was the physical brother of our LORD Yeshua himself.

## Part One: Trust

### Paul and James on Justification

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.webster.com/dictionary/justify>

<sup>2</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 968.

Some see a contradiction between Paul and James on the teaching of justification. Paul emphatically taught that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law while James argued that a man is justified by faith and works (James 2:14-26). Luther is such an individual who saw the two prophets' teachings to be in opposition. Insisting that Paul's view was correct, Luther belittled James's epistle, calling it an 'epistle of straw.' Such an approach to the two authors is not necessary. When the literary context of each other is examined it can be demonstrated that there is no contradiction. The key to understanding these two seemingly contradictory authors is to understand how each uses the terms justified, faith, and works. These words must be defined by their respective contexts. Observe the following table:

<b>Paul</b>	<b>James</b>
<b>Faith</b> =genuine faith and reliance upon God for salvation.	<b>Faith</b> =mental assent that could fail to affect one's actions.
<b>Works</b> =works apart from faith that one believes are able to, or help make him a genuine covenant member.	<b>Works</b> =works that can be done through faith, which attest to genuine faith.
<b>Justified</b> =declared righteous by God because of your trust in his means of salvation.	<b>Justified</b> =show to be righteous as evidenced by your actions. <sup>3</sup>

Paul emphasized that we are saved by faith in Yeshua, and not by our natural or achieved ethnic status. James emphasized that the kind of faith that results in salvation will necessarily produce works that show evidence of that faith. Paul was concerned about people adding anything to faith that they believe is meritorious for their salvation. James was concerned about people professing to have faith that is not really faith at all, but rather a lifeless mental-assent to Messiah. It seems that James was attacking the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish distortion of the Torah's teaching on justification, wherein faith is some dead orthodoxy with no corresponding behavioral changes. Even Paul found it necessary to fight against this distortion of his teaching on justification (Romans 3:8; 6:1, 15). James pointed out that if a person has genuine salvific faith, works will follow after him showing evidence of that faith. Avraham really did believe God, and his works evidenced that fact. If Avraham had refused to offer Yitz'chak upon the altar, it would have demonstrated a lack of faith in God's promises to him (James 2:21-24).

Using a series of bullets to summarize his letters, we shall see that Rav Sha'ul had his hands quite full while attempting to expound HaShem's way—the Torah-true way—of making someone righteous to his 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish detractors:

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<sup>3</sup> David Bernard, *The New Birth* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1984), p. 48-49.

- **"But knowing that a person is not justified from works of law, but through trust of Messiah Yeshua, even we unto Messiah Yeshua trusted, in order that we might be justified from trust of Messiah and not from works of law, because from works of law not will be justified all flesh."** This is a literal rendering of Galatians 3:16 from the Greek.
- Yeshua has made forensic righteousness available to everyone by paying on everyone's behalf the penalty for sins which HaShem's justice demands, viz, death.
- Forensic righteousness is appropriated by an individual for himself the moment he unreservedly puts his trust in God, which at this point in history, entails also trusting in Yeshua the Messiah upon learning of him and understanding what he has done.
- In order to interpret Sha'ul correctly one needs to understand that the phrase "ergon nomos" (works of law) does not mean deeds done in virtue of following the Torah the way HaShem intended, but deeds done in consequence of perverting the Torah into a set of rules which, it is presumed, can be obeyed mechanically, automatically, legalistically, without having faith, without having trust in HaShem, without having love for HaShem or man, and without being empowered by the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit).
- To be sure, in the case of the Galatian congregation, the specific perversion that was taking place sought to transform Gentiles into Jews via a man-made ceremony of conversion, performed under the guise of "covenant inclusion."
- To appreciate the consternation that this halakhah caused Rav Sha'ul, one has to understand that within the 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaisms, the prevailing view was that all Isra'el shared a place in the World to Come. What is more, since Isra'el and Isra'el alone were granted this gift from HaShem it was necessary in the minds of the proto-rabbis to convert Gentiles into Jews before they could enjoy the status of "full-fledged covenant member."
- Because of this feature, the entire sociological situation was subsumed under the label "circumcision". Thus, "works of law" becomes a sort of "short-hand" way for Sha'ul to describe this phenomenon.

In Sha'ul's letter to Ephesus he also seems to be in opposition to Ya'akov (a position which we will examine shortly). A cursory reading of 2:8-9, a familiar passage, gives us the impression that only by faith alone are we considered righteous, and that external actions (assumed to be obedience to Law) are of no apparent consequence to HaShem. The passage needs to be understood in its entirety-to include verse 10! The entire context affirms the biblical fact that our gracious gift of righteousness was indeed granted unto us so that in union with Messiah Yeshua, we might live the life of good actions already prepared for us to do!

## **Part Two: Obey**

Let us examine what Ya'akov has to say about faith and works.

Sanctification and holiness are near equivalents theologically. Both words in their various forms are translated from the same Hebrew root meaning to "cut" or "separate," and the Greek word *hagiasmos*, meaning "consecration." The core concept of holiness, then, is separation and consecration to God (Leviticus 11:44). In our culture sanctification has come to mean the pursuit of moral perfection. Although the latter is included in the Biblical concept of sanctification, it is a corollary to the idea of separation. Sanctification results in morality, but sanctification is not tantamount to morality. God is said to be holy because He is separate from creation and is morally pure in contradistinction to sin.

A reading from James chapter 2 verses 14-26 appears as an overemphasis of actions as opposed to faith. In reality, a common understanding of these verses might give the reader the impression that works are more important than faith itself. Yet, Ya'akov's audience, unlike Sha'ul's, seemingly did not have a problem with an enforced conversion policy. Instead they had a problem with a dead faith that led them nowhere! So Ya'akov masterfully constructed a correct biblical theology that showed that genuine biblical trust ALWAYS leads an individual into genuine biblical actions! This is in complete harmony with what Sha'ul was teaching! Faith must not be substituted for good works, and good works should not be substituted for faith! Moreover, good works do not replace faith, nor does faith cancel out the performance of good works. To be straightforward:

**“Faith and good works go hand in hand! One without the other is incomplete and lacking of true biblical righteousness!”**

We therefore come to understand that for Paul, there was no bifurcation between “faith” and “faithfulness.” They are two sides of the same coin. One may therefore speak of either with the full assurance that the other exists.<sup>4</sup>

Moshe goes to great lengths to demonstrate that a heart that is devoid of true biblical faith (there really is only ONE kind of biblical faith folks!) is a heart that will lead the individual down a degenerative path straight into the curses pronounced in the Torah! The heart of doubt is ultimately headed for destruction, as the curses vividly demonstrate! Moshe's heart, which is the heart of the Father, is that they would truly circumcise their hearts to follow after HaShem and his ways, and to become the people that God truly desires them to be!

## **Conclusions**

Torah is God's teaching to men about righteousness—what it is and how it behaves. The true believer (anyone who is redeemed by the blood of the Lamb)

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (torahresource.com, 2002), p. 98.

does not *do* in order to *become*. He does because he is what God has made him—the righteousness of God in Messiah. Thus Ya'akov writes, "I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18) The true Torah is the walk of faith-faith and rest in the finished work of Messiah.<sup>5</sup>

Blessings and curses might therefore be “woodenly” labeled “the expected consequences of our heart condition.” If we follow trust and obedience, blessings will follow us! But if we harden our hearts and pursue doubt and disobedience, then the Torah instructs us that not only will the blessings be withheld, but that the curses will actually pursue us instead the blessing (see Deuteronomy 28:45). To be sure, we don’t deserve any blessings at all! Yet God in his mercy sees fit to grant blessings, provided we continue in his covenant with a heart that is governed by genuine trust!

The prophet Yechezk’el (Ezekiel) stated it well:

**“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**

**“I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them.**

**“You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors. You will be my people, and I will be your God.**

**“I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will summon the grain and increase it, and not send famine against you.” (Ezekiel 36:26-29, emphasis, mine)**

We affirm with perfect faith that genuine and lasting covenant status is granted to the individual who eventually exercises genuine faith in the Promised Word of HaShem—namely, the Messiah Yeshua. Such status is offered freely to both Jew and Gentile. Jewish people with natural lineage tracing back to Ya’akov are in fact born with a “corporate covenant status” given freely by God and based on his promises made to Avraham. However, this does not automatically grant them the status of right standing in a positional sense. There is no such thing as “involuntary corporate righteousness” in the Torah of HaShem. For the native-born Jewish person, the proper sequence for the covenants is demonstrated when such an individual “graduates” from [mere] corporate faith and belonging towards personal faith in God. To be sure, it is only when God does his monergistic work of opening the eyes of the blind and drawing the individual into his covenant of faith that the person attains genuine and lasting covenant status—the kind of covenant status that is worthy of a place in the ‘Olam Haba (Age to Come).

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<sup>5</sup> Ariel and D’vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (FFOZ, 1996), p. 139.

What place hath the Torah in the life of such an individual? The Torah comes alongside of the Promise (covenant status) and acts as a guarantor that the individual will also achieve behavioral righteousness, thus placing him or her on a direct collision course with the blessings of HaShem! Far from frustrating the grace of God, Torah compliments the grace of God!

This can be demonstrated as far back as Genesis 18 where HaShem makes a fascinating statement about the “father of the faithful,” Avraham Avinu. In another study I have stated it this way:

What makes Avraham such a great role model of faith is that, not only did he trust in the Word of HaShem, but also the LORD saw into his future and predicted that his offspring would also be taught how to trust in the Almighty. Let’s look at 18:17-19,

**“ADONAI said, “Should I hide from Avraham what I am about to do, inasmuch as Avraham is sure to become a great and strong nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by him? For I have made myself known to him, so that he will give orders to his children and to his household after him to keep the way of ADONAI and to do what is right and just, so that ADONAI may bring about for Avraham what he has promised him.” (Emphasis, mine)**

This is a fantastic statement from the mouth of the One who sees every human possibility! Would that we might have HaShem pronounce this blessing over our families today! What must we do? The divine tandem-like actions spoken of here must not be taken too lightly. Firstly, God promises to be faithful to make himself known to us. We like faithful Avraham are then enabled and subsequently covenant-bound to obey the Teachings of our Heavenly Father. Finally, such Teachings are uniquely designed to bring about a righteous behavior in our lives, aligning our lives to be the object of God’s righteous promises! To be sure, the syntax of the above p’sukim (verses) is hinting at that very reality (note the running continuity suggested by the connecting phrases “**so that**” in the quote above)! Furthermore, we must, like faithful Avraham, trust in the LORD against all unbelievable odds, to perform in our lives, the promise that he has given us through Yeshua our Messiah! What is that promise?

**“Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose; because those whom he knew in advance, he also determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn**

**among many brothers; and those whom he thus determined in advance, he also called; and those whom he called, he also caused to be considered righteous; and those whom he caused to be considered righteous he also glorified!” (Romans 8:28-30)**

We usually stop at the first verse, but reading further informs us of our true identity in Messiah: righteous heirs according to trusting faithfulness, causing us to be called, as faithful Avraham was called, “righteous”!<sup>6</sup>

Two significant Scriptural quotes will conclude our study:

**“Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose;**

**“because those whom he knew in advance, he also determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers;**

**“and those whom he thus determined in advance, he also called; and those whom he called, he also caused to be considered righteous; and those whom he caused to be considered righteous he also glorified!” (Romans 8:28-30)**

And also:

**“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:**

**“Not of works, lest any man should boast.**

**“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10, KJV)**

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<sup>6</sup> Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, *Parashat Vayera* (HaNaviy Internet Ministries [HIM], 2006), p. 8, 9.