

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 28

Sha'ul's Letter to the Galatians ~ Part 13

We pause the ongoing story of **Sha'ul** to examine his **Letter to the Galatians**.

In our last post, we left off in Chapter 5:1 with **Sha'ul** describing the **Allegory of Sarah and Hagar**. In this post, we begin his **Doctrine on Messianic Liberty**.

Circumcision: A Matter of Law ~ Part 1

² Mark my words - I, Sha'ul, tell you that if you undergo b'rit-milah (circumcision), the Messiah will be of no advantage to you at all! ³ Again, I warn you: any man who undergoes b'rit-milah is obligated to observe the entire Torah! ⁴ You who are trying to be declared righteous by God through legalism have severed yourselves from the Messiah! You have fallen away from God's grace!

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the message of these verses is directed to **Gentiles**, specifically **Gentiles** whom the **Judaizers** have told that they must believe in **Yeshua** and become **Jews** to be acceptable to **God**. A **Gentile** who heeds them and gets circumcised loses the advantage of the **Messiah** and has fallen away from **God's** grace precisely because he is trying to be declared forensically righteous by **God** (Galatians 2:16a, 2:21) through legalism (literally, "by law"; see Galatians 2:16b).

The truth, says **Sha'ul**, is that now that the **Messiah** has come, a **Gentile** becomes part of **God's** expanded people, the **Messianic Community**, through trusting in **God** and his **Son**. This entails turning from sin, seeking **God's** forgiveness, and being immersed into the **Messiah** (3:27). But it does not entail his becoming **Jewish**. So, if he turns back to the earlier procedure for joining the people of **God**, he is denying the **Messiah** and the new procedure he inaugurated. What a tragedy that a **Gentile** believer, already declared righteous by **God** on the grounds of his trust alone, by becoming dissatisfied and heeding the Judaizers' mistaken preaching that his trust is insufficient, would lose everything **God** has freely given him!

But none of this applies to **Jewish** believers. **Sha'ul** himself circumcised the **Messianic Jew Timothy** (Acts 16:1–3). During his last visit to Yerushalayim, his actions were explicitly directed at disproving the false charge that he told **Jewish** believers not to have their children circumcised (Acts 21:20–27). The **Brit Hadashah** through **Yeshua** no more cancels **b'rit-milah**, the "covenant of circumcision" established by **God** with **Avraham** (Genesis 17:9–12) than the **Sinai** covenant through **Moshe** cancels **God's** promises to **Avraham** (3:15–18).

⁵ For it is by the power of the Spirit, who works in us because we trust and are faithful, that we confidently expect our hope of attaining righteousness to be fulfilled. ⁶ When we are united with the Messiah Yeshua, neither being circumcised nor being uncircumcised matters; what matters is trusting faithfulness expressing itself through love.¹

Neither being circumcised nor being uncircumcised matters so far as being accepted by **God** on the grounds of trusting **Yeshua** is concerned. See 1 Corinthians 7:19, where Sha'ul says the same thing; also, Galatians 6:15 & 3:28. What matters is trust and faithfulness, expressing themselves through good deeds in love. In the **Tanakh** and the **Brit Hadashah**, "**love**" refers to works, not mere feelings. Thus, verse 6 powerfully refutes the idea that **Christianity** and **Messianic Judaism** elevate belief over action and creed over deed.

Good deeds, though always of value to those who benefited, will be of value to those who do them only if they spring from the love that comes through the power of the **Ruach**, who works in us (v. 5). This is how, as

¹ Galatians 5:2–12.

others are helped, we progress toward attaining behavioral righteousness (see Galatians 2:16a, 2:21). The importance of our holiness cannot be sidestepped by claiming that one should not be preoccupied with one's spiritual progress but should be concerned with the well-being of others. The two are not mutually exclusive; one must be concerned for others without countenancing sin in one's life (see Yochanan 17:15–17, Ya'akov (James) 1:27).

In our next post, we will continue to explore **Sha'ul's Doctrine on Messianic Liberty**, starting in chapter 5:7.