

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 72

1 Corinthians ~ Part 12

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

As I mentioned in my last post, we continue to explore **Sha'ul's Letters to the Corinthians**.

Regarding Marriage & Singleness ~ Part 2

Remaining In the Present State

Fair Warning: In this blog, you will probably learn more about the issue of circumcision than you ever really wanted to know.

¹⁷ Only let each person live the life the Lord has assigned him and live it in the condition he was in when God called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the congregations.

***Let each person live the life the Lord has assigned him**, whether single or married, and let him **live it in the condition he was in when God called him**. Sha'ul applies this to two "conditions" - being **Jewish** or **Gentile** (vv. 18–20) and being enslaved or free (vv. 21–24), repeating at the end of each of these sections his admonition not to seek unnecessary change in one's religious, social, or economic status when the time can be better spent serving the **Lord**.*

¹⁸ Was someone already circumcised when he was called? Then, he should not try to remove the marks of his circumcision.

***Someone already circumcised when he was called**, that is, a **Jewish Believer**, **should not try to remove the marks of his circumcision**. From this, we can reasonably infer that he should not assimilate into **Gentile** or so-called "**Christian**" culture but should remain distinctly **Jewish**. Sha'ul is talking about more than physical circumcision. However, the specific operation of "de-circumcision" was performed by **Jewish Hellenizers** in the days of **King Antiochus IV** (whose desecration of the Temple in 165 BCE eventually resulted in the feast of **Chanukkah**; see Yochanan 10:22).¹*

Was someone uncircumcised when he was called? He shouldn't undergo b'rit-milah.

***Someone uncircumcised when he was called shouldn't get circumcised**. That is, a **Gentile Believer** should not convert to **Judaism**. This does not speak of a **Gentile Christian** who wants to give up his faith in **Yeshua** and convert to non-**Messianic Judaism** - of course, Sha'ul would not countenance that. Instead, he says that **Gentile Believers** should not undergo conversion to **Judaism** while retaining their faith in **Yeshua**. When Sha'ul was writing, there was a solid Judaizing movement, but Sha'ul did not deal with this error (elsewhere, he did; see **Acts 15** and the whole book of **Galatians**). Here, his chief concern is with the use of time (see vv. 25–40); his advice to **Gentiles** is not to waste time converting to **Judaism** when it is unnecessary (v. 19), and there are more important things to do, namely, serving the **Lord**. On the controversial question of whether there might ever be circumstances under which **Gentile Christians** could legitimately convert to **Judaism** in the light of what the **Brit Hadashah** teaches, see Galatians 5:2–4, which continues the present discussion. ² [Several years ago, I asked our local **Rabbi** what he would do with a **Gentile** who had been circumcised at birth and wanted to convert to **Judaism**. He said he would have to draw blood from his privates.]*

¹⁹ Being circumcised means nothing, and being uncircumcised means nothing; what does mean something is keeping God's commandments.

Being circumcised means nothing. By themselves, out of context, these words are a slap in the face of **Judaism**, in which **circumcision** confirms a man's membership in **God's** people under the covenant with **Avraham** (Genesis 17:1–14). But in context, with the rest of the verse, the meaning is that in **God's**

¹ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary.

² IBID.

Messianic Community, Jews and Gentiles have equal standing before **God** (1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 3:22–23, 29–30; Galatians 3:28, 5:6, 6:15; Colossians 3:11). On this ethnic ties, cultural expressions, customs and social or religious status have no bearing; in this regard, being **Jewish** or **Gentile** does not matter. What matters is *keeping God's commandments*, elsewhere in similar contexts equated with *"faith working itself out in love"* (Galatians 5:6) and *"being a new creation"* (Galatians 6:15). One may argue that **God's** commandments to **Jews** differ from his commandments to **Gentiles**. Determining whether that is true requires a lengthy analysis, for which you can see my *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, Chapter V (entitled *"Torah"*). However, the requirement to keep the applicable commandments is identical for **Jews** and **Gentiles**, and the trust in **Yeshua**, which forms the basis for being acceptable in **God's** sight, is also identical for **Jews** and **Gentiles**. For this, *"being circumcised means nothing"* (see Romans 4:9–12).³

*²⁰ Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called. ²¹ Were you a slave when you were called? Well, don't let it bother you, although if you can gain your freedom, take advantage of the opportunity. ²² For a person who was a slave when he was called is the Lord's freedman; likewise, someone who was a free man when he was called is a slave of the Messiah. ²³ You were bought at a price, so do not become slaves of other human beings. ²⁴ Brothers, let each one remain with God in the condition in which he was called.*⁴

This is a concluding restatement of verses 17 and 20.

In our next post, we will continue to explore **Sha'ul's Letters to the Corinthians**, beginning with 1 Corinthians 7:25 and exploring a new topic entitled **Reason for Advice**.

³ IBID.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:17-24