

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 76

1 Corinthians ~ Part 16

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 Mutual Submission ~ Part 3

Rewards for Giving Up Rights

¹⁵ But I have not made use of any of these rights. Nor am I writing now to secure them for myself, for I would rather die than be deprived of my ground for boasting! ¹⁶ For I can't boast merely because I proclaim the Good News - this I do from inner compulsion: woe is me if I don't proclaim the Good News! ¹⁷ For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if I do it unwillingly, I still do it, simply because I've been entrusted with a job. ¹⁸ So then, what is my reward? Just this: that in proclaiming the Good News I can make it available free of charge, without making use of the rights to which it entitles me.

Although **Sha'ul** has the right to live from preaching the **Gospel**, he does not; instead, he supports himself through his trade, tentmaking (Acts 18:3). He regards his independence as its own reward because it means that he can make the **Gospel available free of charge** and not expose himself to the slightest risk of abusing his right to be supported by the **Believers**. [I wonder how this would work in our own times?]

Concession v. Assertion

¹⁹ For although I am a free man, not bound to do anyone's bidding, I have made myself a slave to all in order to win as many people as possible. ²⁰ That is, with Jews, what I did was put myself in the position of a Jew in order to win Jews. With people in subjection to a legalistic perversion of the Torah, I put myself in the position of someone under such legalism in order to win those under this legalism, even though I myself am not in subjection to a legalistic perversion of the Torah.

Sha'ul's "self-imposed slavery" gave him the freedom to accommodate **Jews** and **Gentiles** alike and, therefore, speak the **Gospel** in a forthright manner, unhindered by cultural hang-ups. He exemplified this freedom among **Jews** when he circumcised **Timothy** (whose mother was **Jewish**) to maximize the **Gospel** witness in **Jewish** areas (Acts 16:3). Among **Gentiles** who were **without the law**, he yielded his rights in order to maximize the **Gospel's** advance. For example, he would not take a wage if taking a wage would cause those "outside the law" to stumble. The phrase **not being without God's law but within Christ's law** refers to him as one who had the right under God's law to receive a wage (cp. 1 Corinthians 9:8-10), yet among **Gentiles**, he yielded that right.

²¹ With those who live outside the framework of the Torah, I put myself in the position of someone outside the Torah in order to win those outside the Torah - although I myself am not outside the framework of God's Torah but within the framework of Torah as upheld by the Messiah. ²² With the "weak," I became "weak" in order to win the "weak." With all kinds of people, I have become all kinds of things so that in all kinds of circumstances, I might save at least some of them. ²³ But I do it all because of the rewards promised by the Good News, so that I may share in them along with the others who come to trust.

One of **Sha'ul's** motives in making himself everyone's slave is altruistic, the desire to win their trust in **Yeshua** (vv. 19-22). In a manner of speaking, the other is selfish (see the last paragraph of Romans 11:11-12) - the desire to share in the benefits promised by the **Good News**. However, neither the **Tanakh** nor the **Brit Hadashah** ever considers it selfishness for a believer to desire eagerly all the good things God promises; indeed, one of the good things promised is freedom from selfishness.

Value of Self-Discipline

Sha'ul disabuses readers who might think his having won some people to the **Lord** assures his place in heaven. One can never rest on one's salvation laurels; on the contrary, having invited others to enter the competition, one must continue to fight temptation and run harder. However, the competition is not against other people but against one's old nature (Romans 8:9–13). He reinforces this message in Philippians 3:7–14; compare Romans 12:1–2 and Messianic Jews (Hebrews) 12:1–13).

²⁴ Don't you know that in a race, all the runners compete, but only one wins the prize? So then, run to win! ²⁵ Now, every athlete in training submits himself to strict discipline, and he does it just to win a laurel wreath that will soon wither away. But we do it to win a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Accordingly, I don't run aimlessly but straight for the finish line; I don't shadow-box but try to make every punch count. ²⁷ I treat my body hard and make it my slave so that, after proclaiming the Good News to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

I treat my body hard (literally, "I give my body a black eye") ***and make it my slave***; **Sha'ul** himself is the **Messiah's** slave (Romans 1:1, Philippians 1:1) and everybody's slave (v. 19). Not that **Sha'ul** deprecates the flesh - the **Greek** word is not "sarx" ("flesh"), but "sôma" ("body"). Instead, the body makes a good servant but a bad master (compare Romans 8:13). **Sha'ul** is probably speaking here of being ***disqualified*** from the rewards due to faithful workers (1 Corinthians 3:8–15), not from salvation itself. ¹

In our next post, we will continue to explore **Sha'ul's Letters to the Corinthians**, beginning with 1 Corinthians 10:1 and exploring more **Regarding Mutual Submission**.

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:15-27.