

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 78

1 Corinthians ~ Part 18

Note: This is a longer post than usual. You may want to download the PDF at the bottom.

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

Regarding Mutual Submission ~ Part 5

Actions Indicate Loyalties

Building on the warnings of vv. 6–13 (see previous post), **Sha'ul** presents a new reason for not eating food sacrificed to idols (the issue raised in 1 Corinthians 8:1): It just doesn't make sense for sensible people (v. 15) to drink both a cup of the **Lord** and a cup of demons (v. 21). This is the capstone of the argument, supporting and leading up to the conclusion at v. 23 (below).

¹⁴ Therefore, my dear friends, run from idolatry! ¹⁵ I speak to you as sensible people; judge for yourselves what I am saying. ¹⁶ The "cup of blessing" over which we make the b'rakhah—isn't it a sharing in the bloody sacrificial death of the Messiah? The bread we break, isn't it a sharing in the body of the Messiah?

The "cup of blessing." The third cup of the **Pesach Seder** is called the **"cup of blessing,"** and since vv. 16–21 is about the **Lord's Supper**, based on the **Last Supper** that **Yeshua** ate, which was a **Pesach Seder**; this may be the meaning. Or, because of the following phrase, **"over which we make a b'rakhah"** (Hebrew for "blessing" ¹), said to consecrate the wine and make it "be" for our sharing (or "communion"), the **Messiah's bloody sacrificial death**.

¹⁷ Because there is one loaf of bread, we who are many constitute one body since we all partake of the one loaf of bread.

Since we all partake of the one loaf of bread, Yeshua, who said, "I am the bread of life" (Yochanan 6:35), we who are many constitute one body. This becomes the seed idea of chapter 12.

¹⁸ Look at physical Isra'el: don't those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?

Physical Isra'el, literally, "the Israel according to flesh." This is a crucial verse for evaluating the traditional Christian claim, formalized as Replacement theology, that the Church has supplanted the Jews as "the true Israel" or "the new Israel." In the present verse, the issue takes this form: does **Sha'ul's** use of the phrase "according to flesh" imply the existence of a different Israel "according to Spirit"? **Sha'ul** contrasts these two modifiers at Romans 1:3–4, 8:4–5, and Galatians 4:29. These are the only places where the phrase "according to Spirit" appears at all in the New Testament. However, in 19 other places where the phrase "according to the flesh" is found, one can usually imagine an alternative, "according to Spirit." But it is in Romans 11:17–24, in his analogy with cultivated and wild olive trees, that **Sha'ul** expresses most clearly his understanding of **Isra'el** in the present era as consisting of three groups—branches of the cultivated tree which have been cut off and remain cut off (non-Messianic Jews), branches of the cultivated tree which have been cut off and grafted back into their tree (Messianic Jews), and wild olive branches that have been grafted into the cultivated tree (Gentile Christians); see Romans 11:23–24. Thus, **physical Israel** is a subset of **Isra'el** consisting of the first two of these three groups: non-Messianic Jews plus Messianic Jews. At no place in the New Testament is the Church called the new **Isra'el** or the true **Isra'el**—more on this in Romans 11:26a and Galatians 6:16. ²

¹ In Hebrew, the blessing is "**Ba-rooch ah-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hay-noo meh-lehch ha-oh-lahm, bo-ray p'ree ha-ga-fen.**" In English: **Blessed are you, oh Lord, King of the Universe who created the fruit of the vine.**

¹⁹ *So, what am I saying? That food sacrificed to idols has any significance in itself? Or that an idol has significance in itself?* ²⁰ *No, what I am saying is that the things which pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice not to God but to demons, and I don't want you to become sharers of the demons!* ²¹ *You can't drink both a cup of the Lord and a cup of demons; you can't partake in both a meal of the Lord and a meal of demons.* ²² *Or are we trying to make the Lord jealous? We aren't stronger than he is, are we?*

Sha'ul prohibited participation in pagan ritualistic meals because this involved intimacy with **demons**. He continued to affirm the non-reality of idols as deities (8:4–6), but demons are both real and powerful. He did not want the **Corinthians** to discount demonic presence at the "idols' table." The word **they** refer back to idolatrous **Isra'el** in the wilderness when they overlooked demonic presence, just as the **Corinthian** believers were tempted to do. **Sha'ul** called the **Corinthian** believers to remember the example of **Isra'el** when they provoked the **Lord** to **jealousy** by their idolatry, which resulted in a plague (Exodus 32:33–35).

Liberty Yields Forbearance

This section concludes the train of thought that began in 8:1, summarizing the principle that **Believers** should limit the exercise of their freedom ("knowledge," 8:1) out of consideration for those who have weak consciences.

²³ *"Everything is permitted," you say? Maybe, but not everything is helpful. "Everything is permitted?" Maybe, but not everything is edifying.* ²⁴ *No one should be looking out for his own interests but for those of his fellow.*

The overriding principle of 8:1–11:1 is to seek **the good of the other person**. **Believers** must conscribe their actions to benefit others, especially where this can lead to salvation for nonbelievers (cp. vv. 32–33). All **Believers** should adopt limits on their rights and freedoms.

²⁵ *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,* ²⁶ *for the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord.*

In what may seem a surprising twist, **Sha'ul** said seeking "the good of the other person" (v. 24) meant a **Believer** who objected to buying meat that had been sacrificed to idols should not interrogate the meat sellers to certify that the meat had no association with idolatry. Why? Most likely, this is because such questions would seem hostile and alienate the nonbelieving **Greeks** at **Corinth**, thus hindering the gospel's advance. **Sha'ul** offered scriptural support for this position from Psalm 24:1: *The earth is Adonai's, with all that is in it, the world and those who live there.* Therefore, partake of the meat out of gratitude and a clear conscience.

²⁷ *If some unbeliever invites you to a meal, and you want to go, eat whatever is put in front of you without raising questions of conscience.* ²⁸ *But if someone says to you, "This meat was offered as a sacrifice," then don't eat it, out of consideration for the person who pointed it out and also for conscience's sake—*²⁹ *however, I don't mean your conscience but that of the other person. You say, "Why should my freedom be determined by someone else's conscience?"* ³⁰ *If I participate with thankfulness, why am I criticized over something for which I myself bless God?"*

Sha'ul prohibited eating meat if someone explicitly pointed out that it had been **offered as a sacrifice**. In this situation, the food's history mattered because the person who pointed it out felt that a **Believer** eating such meat would compromise his allegiance to **Yeshua**. After a parenthetical interruption that explains an exception to one's freedom (vv. 28–29a), these rhetorical questions introduce the basis for the **Believer's** freedom to eat whatever is given to them without questions of conscience.

Yield Yourself for Others' Sake

³¹ *Well, whatever you do, whether it's eating or drinking or anything else, do it all so as to bring glory to God.* ³² *Do not be an obstacle to anyone—not to Jews, not to Gentiles, and not to God's Messianic Community.* ³³ *Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not looking out for*

² David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary.

my own interests but for those of the many, so that they may be saved; 11¹ try to imitate me, even as I myself try to imitate the Messiah.³

Anyone who wishes to do everything for God's glory cannot succeed if they disregard others. **Sha'ul** permanently relinquished his rights for the spiritual profit of others—***that they may be saved***. **Sha'ul's** admonition to ***imitate*** him was justified inasmuch as he was an apt imitator of the **Messiah**.

In our next post, we will eagerly explore **Sha'ul's** Letters to the **Corinthians**, starting with 1 Corinthians 11:2 and delving deeper into the topic of **Regarding Role Distinctions**. Stay tuned for more insights and revelations.

³ 1 Corinthians 10:14–11:1.