

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 97

2 Corinthians ~ Part 4

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

As I emphasized in my previous posts, we are delving into the profound significance of **Sha'ul's Letters to the Corinthians**, a crucial cornerstone of our faith. This significance is not to be taken lightly but to be deeply understood and appreciated, invoking a sense of the weight of this text's importance in our faith.

Beginning in this post, we will examine the topic **Regarding Sha'ul's Ministry**, which covers 2 Corinthians 2:14 to 9:15.

Success of Ministry

14 But thanks be to God, who in the Messiah constantly leads us in a triumphal procession and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of what it means to know Him!

In antiquity, victorious generals paraded into their capital city toward the King's palace with human captives and treasure displayed behind them. Sweet incense was offered. The citizens saw and smelled evidence of victory. **Yeshua** is leading **Sha'ul** and all other believers into the eternal city where **God** is **King**.

15 For to God we are the aroma of the Messiah, both among those being saved and among those being lost; 16 to the latter, we are the smell of death leading only to more death; but to the former, we are the sweet smell of life leading to more life. Who is equal to such a task?

In these verses, two pairs of opposites are crafted so that the inner two elements are harmful and the outer two are positive. The same aroma produces different results. Those who receive the knowledge of **Yeshua** through the **Gospel** message live. All others perish.

17 For we are not like a lot of folks who go about huckstering God's message for a fee; on the contrary, we speak out of a sincere heart, as people sent by God, standing in God's presence, living in union with the Messiah.

We don't ***go about huckstering God's message for a fee***. Quite the opposite—**Sha'ul** made the **Good News** available to the Corinthians free of charge (2 Corinthians 10:7, 11:7–12, 12:13; also 1 Corinthians 9:12b–19, Acts 18:2–3), even though he was entitled to material support (1 Corinthians 9:4–12a, Galatians 6:6). The **Mishna** expresses the same attitude toward teaching *Torah*: ***"Do not make of it a crown with which to advance yourself or a spade with which to dig"***

They Are Sha'ul's Proof

3 1 Are we starting to recommend ourselves again? Or do we, like some, need letters of recommendation either to you or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. 3 You make it clear that you are a letter from the Messiah placed in our care, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on human hearts.

You are a letter from the Messiah placed in our care for safe delivery to **God** at the final Judgment (compare Philippians 1:6, 1 Kefa 1:5–8). **God** wrote the **Torah on stone tablets** (Exodus 24:12, 31:18, 34:1; Deuteronomy 9:10–11); they are symbolized in Jewish decorative art by the familiar arch-shaped pair of panels containing the initial **Hebrew** words of the **Ten Commandments**. ***On human hearts*** (literally, "on tablets [which are] hearts made of flesh"), the **Tanakh** uses the same imagery in Proverbs 3:3, 7:3, and Jeremiah 31:32(33), quoted in the following note. The prophet Ezekiel says that when **God** regathers the **Jewish** exiles and gives them the **Land of Isra'el**, He will ***"take the stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh"*** (11:19), ***"and I will put a new Spirit within you"*** (36:26). The contrast between stone and flesh (or the Spirit) is continued in 2 Corinthians 3:6–11 and 14.

Source of Sha'ul's Competence

⁴ Such is the confidence we have through the Messiah toward God. ⁵ It is not that we are competent in ourselves to count anything as having come from us; on the contrary, our competence is from God. ⁶ He has even made us competent to be workers serving a New Covenant, the essence of which is not a written text but the Spirit. For the written text brings death, but the Spirit gives life. ¹

Are you feeling inadequate in your abilities or qualifications for a task? Remember that your competence comes from **God**. Pray for His guidance and strength as you step out in faith to complete the task, trusting that He will equip you with everything you need to succeed.

Sha'ul's confidence described in this verse does not refer to self-confident arrogance or false humility. There is no sufficiency for faithful **Messianic** ministry except **from God**. This verse answers the question at the end of 2:16. The **New Covenant** was prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31–33, established by **Yeshua's** death in Luke 22:20, and ministered by **Sha'ul**. **For the written text brings, death** refers to the law of the **Torah**, which was not designed to give life. It only revealed sin (Romans 7:7–12). The **Spirit** takes the **Gospel** proclamation and creates new **life** by faith (Romans 8:10; 10:17).

In our next post, we will continue to examine **Sha'ul's Second Letter to the Corinthians**. Stay tuned for more insights and revelations.

¹ David H. Stern, [*Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh \(Old Testament\) and B'rit Hadashah \(New Testament\)*](#), 1st ed. (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998), 2 Co 3:4–6.