

The Letter To The Galatians

From the book "Take Hold" by Ariel, and D'vorah Berkowitz

Even more so than the letter to the Romans, the epistle to the Galatians is cited to discourage those in the body of Messiah who desire to live according to the teachings of Moses.

All of the following so-called "problem passages" from Galatians can easily be answered in a Torah-positive way if we simply bear in mind the context of the whole book of Galatians. The context is established in the letter's thesis statement in 2:15-16:

"We, being Jews by birth, and not Gentile sinners, yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through the faith of Yeshua the Messiah, even we believed in Messiah Yeshua, that we might be justified by faith in Messiah, and not by the works of the law, because no flesh will be justified by the works of the law."

The thesis is this: No person may be justified before God by obeying any list of rules or teachings. That is legalism. Rather, justification is a gift of God given by grace to those who rely solely on the person and work of Messiah Yeshua.

One of the problems in the Galatian fellowship was that there were apparently teachers circulating either from within or from without who were saying that justification is achieved by a combination of faith plus works. In other words, they were teaching that a person had to do the Torah in addition to trusting Messiah in order for God to declare him righteous. Accordingly, we can expect to find many seemingly anti-Torah statements in this letter, which we do! If we remember this background then we can realize that Sha'ul (Paul) is not teaching against the Torah, but against a legalistic observance of the Torah. Let us examine several passages from this oft-misunderstood letter.

Galatians 2:15-16

As we have already stated, this passage is the thesis statement for this letter to the Galatians. The issue on Sha'ul's mind was God's requirement for our justification.

There is one more point from verse 16 that we would like to make. Looking at the Greek of Galatians 2:16, we find that the definite article before the phrase "works of law" has been left out. It is not, as many English versions translate it, "works of the law". If the translator adds the definite article, the reader assumes that "the law" is a reference to the Torah. However, it is not. "Works of law" is a phrase indicating a man-made system of

works, of which performance-based acceptance is the core belief. Thus, this phrase is *ergon nomou* and should be translated as “works of law”.

Accordingly, Galatians 2:16 should read: “knowing that a man is not justified by works of law but through faith in Messiah Yeshua, even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, that we may be justified by faith in Messiah, and not by works of law; since by works of law shall no flesh be justified.”

We encounter the same translation mistake in verse 19, which states, “For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God.” Here again, in the Greek, there are no definite articles before the words translated “law”. Knowing this permits us to translate this verse: “For, I through law, died to law, in order that to God I might live.”. The point here is that Paul was not saying that he died to the Torah, but merely to “law”. We can paraphrase what he was saying in this way: “It was through legalistic obedience to a set of laws that I realized that I was a sinner. For, I found that obedience was not that which would change me. This pointed me to Messiah. I found that it is only through a personal relationship with Him that God grants a new life. My attempt at legalism backfired! Instead of making me closer to God, it only served to emphasize my sinfulness. Therefore, in Messiah, God caused me to die to law that I might live for Him.”

The Torah then, was not in question. Our constant need in the flesh to feel good about ourselves by believing that we have earned righteousness is what is in question! Any time that the Torah of God is reduced to a system of works, what we have is no longer Torah but a man-made system of works—law. Man will always try to reduce God’s Words to laws to be obeyed instead of the Words of life—what they truly are. We who are in Messiah have died to exactly this abuse of the Word of God. Now we embrace the Renewed Covenant in our relationship with God as that which is our very life, our new creation life!