

Preface

The Apostle Paul wrote to the gentiles in Rome according to the New Testament he said the following:

Romans 2:23-29

2:23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 2:24 For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' just as it is written. 2:25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 2:26 So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 2:27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 2:29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from

Paul is discussing the importance of not being a hypocrite in our faith and our walk before God and others. Note what Paul is saying here in *Romans 2:28-29*, that we are all to be Jews inwardly. What exactly is he trying to say here, both the Jew and Gentile are to be Jews inwardly? Paul speaks of having faith inwardly which motivates us to live our lives for the Lord. What we should be looking for is the power of God working in our lives in such a way as to produce the fruit of the spirit which leads to walking in righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He contrasts this to the one who lives in the flesh, who relies upon the outward things (circumcision) as proof of salvation, as opposed to the one who trusts in God for his salvation, and is able to see the Lord working powerfully in one's life to overcome sin. When we look back on our lives and see how the Lord has worked and is working, this brings great joy to know that He is taking care of us. In the Joy of Torah series, we look at the Torah portions in relation to who we are in the Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) that is coupled to the joy of walking in His ways. We take a multidisciplinary approach by considering the history, the culture, the people, and the languages in order to help us understand the Scriptures and how to apply God's Word to our lives. The studies in this book look at the Hebrew Scriptures (Masoretic Text), the Aramaic (Targumim), and the Greek (Septuagint), coupled with studies in the rabbinic literature (Talmud, Mishnah, and Midrashim, with the classical commentators: Rashi, Sforno, Rambam, etc). Our goal is to immerse ourselves in the language, the history, the culture, and the people who lived in the time of Moshe, the Prophets, and the Messiah, in order to deepen our understanding of Scripture, increase our faith, and grow in our relationship with the Lord! This may be illustrated in the following way.

In Midrash on Psalms 97, Part 1 the rabbis state, *"The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad (Tehillim / Psalms 97:1) then, for God will come to fight against heathen nations of the earth. Clouds and darkness are round about Him. But with righteousness and justice the foundation of His throne (Tehillim / Psalms 97:2), He will show mercy to the people of Israel, as is said, Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth will go before You."* (Midrash Tehillim 97, Part 1) The Lord reigns and though He is all powerful, He remains merciful, and establishes righteousness and justice as a way for His people. The Lord provides us with His word and it should delight us to study His word. This is where the concept of studying Torah brings joy to one's soul is developed. The association of Torah study with the experience of joy must be set in its proper context however. One can find numerous associations of Torah study with joy in the rabbinic literature, but the study of the Torah is not to be for the

sake of the satisfaction of one's physical appetites or for pride. Take for example from the Talmud Bavli Taanit 20a we read the following:

Talmud Bavli Taanit 20a

מעשה שבא רבי אלעזר (בן ר') שמעון ממגדל גדור מבית רבו והיה רכוב על החמור ומטייל על שפת נהר ושמח שמחה גדולה והיתה דעתו גסה עליו מפני שלמד תורה הרבה *It once happened that R. Eleazar the son of R. Simeon was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher, and he was riding his donkey by the river and he felt a great happiness and full of himself because he had studied a lot of Torah*

The Talmud Bavli Taanit 20b follows with a story on what happened to Rabbi Eleazar as a result of his pride.

Talmud Bavli Taanit 20b

A particularly ugly man happened upon him and said to him, Peace be upon you, Rabbi, and he [R. Eleazar] did not respond. He said to him, Good for nothing! How ugly this man is! Are all the people of your city as ugly as you are? The man said: I do not know, but go and tell the artisan who made me, how ugly is the vessel which you have made. When he [R. Eleazar] acknowledged, in his gut, that he had done wrong he got down from his donkey and prostrated himself before the man and said to him, I submit myself to you; forgive me. He said to him: I will not forgive you until you go to the artisan that created me and tell him: How ugly is the vessel that you created. He [R. Eleazar] walked behind him until he reached his city. When his fellow citizens came out to meet him greeting him with the words, 'Peace be upon you Rabbi and teacher,' the man asked them, 'Who are you calling Rabbi, Rabbi?' They replied, ... 'The man who is walking behind you.' He said to them: 'If this man is a Rabbi, may there not be any more like him in Israel!' They asked him: 'Why'? He replied: 'He did such and such to me.' They said to him: 'Nevertheless, forgive him, for he is a man of great Torah learning.' The man replied: 'For your sakes I will forgive him, but only if he does not make

a habit of acting this way.' Immediately, R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon entered [the Beit Midrash] and expounded, A man should always be soft like a reed and not hard like a cedar. And for this reason the reed merited that of it should be made a quill for the writing of the Torah scroll, phylacteries and mezuzot.

The concepts here are studying God's word should not become a matter of pride in one's life. We should consider it a great privilege to have God's word and be thankful for the freedoms of being able to study God's word each day. The enjoyment of Torah study became such a fixed entity in the rabbinic imagination that it achieved a ritual significance in the life of the rabbis. The context of the story of Rabbi Eleazar is the concept of "*Rejoice, Oh my soul, rejoice, Oh my soul, for you I have read Torah, for you I have recited Mishnah*" where one rejoices in himself on the performance of the command because doing so pleased our Father in heaven. The joyous quality of Torah study is brought into the context of the festivals along with the other materials of celebration such as eating and drinking (Table fellowship), with oil, praising God, wearing festive garments, etc. The rabbis also however step back and ask the question of whether the Torah should be studied for a higher purpose? Should not the Torah to be studied for higher purposes than merely the pleasure or "joy" for one's own self for doing so? Rabbi Eleazar's answer is a resounding "YES," saying "*A man should always be soft like a reed and not hard like a cedar. And for this reason the reed merited that of it should be made a quill for the writing of the Torah scroll, phylacteries and mezuzot.*" The higher purpose for studying God's word is to change our hearts from the inside towards others and towards God; to show love for our fellow man which demonstrates God's love for us in His mercy.

The Midrash on Psalms 97, Part 2 concludes saying, "*Light is sown for the righteous (Tehillim / Psalms 97:11). This is the great light which the Holy One blessed be He, created when the earth was created, and which He hid away for the righteous against the time when He will take it from its sheath, as is said Raise, shine, for your light is come (Isaiah 60:1). Then the holy One blessed be He, will say, Be glad in the Lord, you righteous; and give thanks to His Holy Name (Tehillim / Psalms 97:12).*" Note there is something that has been created from since before the creation, that the Lord has reserved for His people. This Light that is sown, are righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth, all of which

God's people are called to walk in according to God's Word. Whereas, judgment (justice, righteousness) is meted out to those who are disobedient, or as Paul says, to those who do not "*Obey*" the gospel of Yeshua (*2 Thessalonians 1*). Note that the Apostolic Writings speak of the new man who is created in justice, holiness, and truth. These things, justice, holiness, righteousness, were created from since the beginning (Ephesians 2:10) that we should walk in them. Paul is teaching a rabbinic concept, the thing we were created for, to bring glory to God by the way we live our lives, and to seek the Lord God our Father in heaven with all of our heart, mind, and strength (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:5*). This is the Joy of Torah!

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