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The Faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah

New things are being proposed in today's contemporary Bible scholarship, and they are opening some unique doors to the developing theology *and* spirituality of our maturing Messianic movement. One such phenomenon is the proposal that when "works of law" (Grk. *ergōn nomou*, ζργων νόμου) is referred to in the Pauline Epistles (Galatians 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10; Romans 3:20, 28), it is not speaking about "observing the law" (NIV) as such, but more specifically about the *halachah* of an ancient sect of Judaism (cf. 4QMMT). This has enabled us to see that the issue Paul confronts in Galatians, to be specific, is not necessarily about the Galatians being forced to follow the Mosaic Torah for salvation, but rather the Galatians being made subject to *halachic* rulings that would require them to become formal proselytes to Judaism in order to be fully accepted among God's people.¹

Paul spoke against "works of law" in order for people to be reckoned as a part of God's community in Messiah Yeshua. This is because identity is to be found elsewhere. But if our principal identity as God's people is not to be found in manmade "works of law," then where is it to be found? Paul gives Peter the answer in Galatians 2:16:

"[N]evertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Messiah Yeshua, even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, so that we may be justified by faith in Messiah and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (NASU).

The Apostle Paul says that we are not to be justified, or reckoned as a part of God's people, via "works of law." Instead, as it has been commonly quoted to us, we are brought into covenant with God "through faith in Christ Jesus." We have to place our trust in what Yeshua did for us on the cross at Golgotha (Calvary), performing what Romans 10:9 tells us to do: "if you confess with your mouth Yeshua *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." It seems pretty straightforward, right?

None of us should ever deny how important it is to place faith and trust in Yeshua for redemption. Ephesians 2:8 so astutely summarizes it: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God." But what if I were to tell you, that just as there have been background and translation issues present with properly

¹ Please note that the conclusions drawn in the previous chapter, "What Are 'Works of the Law'?", will be explored further in this chapter. It is recommended that you have read this previous article, in order to understand the vantage point that the author takes regarding "the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah."

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understanding what “works of law” meant to Paul and Peter, so might there be something more to investigate with what “works of law” are contrasted to?

Faith in *or* the Faithfulness of?

We cannot deny how in informing Peter that justification—in Galatians 2:16 regarding how one is reckoned to be a member of God’s people²—does not come by “works of law,” Paul is speaking of human action. But what are these “works of law” contrasted to? Most, reading the English text, would conclude “faith in Messiah Yeshua.” *Not an incorrect answer when the wider Biblical narrative is taken into account. Faith or trust placed in Yeshua is important.* Paul’s later quotations of Habakkuk 2:4, “Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith” (cf. Galatians 3:11; Romans 1:17), make it clear that he believed that righteous people eternally live by the faith or trust they place in God, and by extension, Messiah Yeshua. The faith that a person is to place in God was originally contrasted to one entreating an idol of his own making (Habakkuk 2:18-20). But what if in passages like Galatians 2:16, faith that people place in Yeshua may not be the *specific* issue?

The KJV actually rendered Galatians 2:16 with, “a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” The “faith of Yeshua the Messiah” is a bit different than “faith in Yeshua the Messiah.” Could we simply view this as the faith that we should place in Yeshua the Messiah, one that is “of” Him because it is involved with Him or related to a person’s relationship in Him? Or, is this faith something that Yeshua has somehow performed or accomplished Himself, His faithfulness unto death that has secured our eternal redemption?

Discussing the various issues present with the “faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” is not just an academic exercise designed to split grammatical hairs on some random Greek clauses, taking up time and paper. Considering the “faithfulness of Yeshua” is, rather, **an important spiritual exercise** where we engage with the Scriptures, the thoughts of various specialists, and we reflect on the original question posed in Galatians 2:16.

Literally speaking, the genitive clause (genitive is the Greek case indicating possession)³ *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) should be rendered as “through faith of Jesus Christ” (YLT). Some modern study Bibles are having to place footnotes for verses like Galatians 2:16, indicating the alternative rendering, “Or by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.”⁴ Daniel B. Wallace summarizes what has emerged in recent decades, in his textbook *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*:

“Older commentaries...see Χριστοῦ [*Christou*] as an objective gen[itive], thus, ‘faith in Christ.’ However, more and more scholars are embracing these texts as involving a subjective gen[itive] (thus, either ‘Christ’s faith’ or ‘Christ’s faithfulness’).”⁵

It should be immediately noted that the Hebrew *emunah* (אֱמוּנָה) in the Tanach Scriptures can be legitimately rendered as either “faith” or “faithfulness,”⁶ and the same goes for *pistis* (πίστις) in Greek.⁷ Context determines which is correct. Richard N. Longenecker indicates, “when πίστις is understood in terms of the Hebrew term אֱמוּנָה, *ēmûnâ*, which means both ‘faith’

² Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 113 reminds us, “here, in context, ‘righteousness’, *dikaiosynē*, must refer to one’s status as a member of God’s people. It means ‘covenant status’ or ‘covenant membership.’”

³ Please note that this article does make references to various points of Greek grammar. For an easily accessible guide, consult David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

⁴ *God’s Game Plan: The Athlete’s Bible 2007*, HCSB (Nashville: Serendipity House Publishers, 2007), 1136.

⁵ Wallace, 115.

⁶ CHALOT, 19.

⁷ BDAG, pp 818-820.

and ‘faithfulness,’ then it is not too difficult to view Paul⁸ as using it the same way. The clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* can be legitimately rendered as the “faithfulness of Jesus Christ,” no different than how similar clauses like *tēn pistin tou Theou* (τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ) or *pisteōs Abraam* (πίστεως Ἀβραάμ), are rendered as “the faithfulness of God” (Romans 3:3) and “the faith of Abraham” (Romans 4:14), respectively.

“Works of law,” human activity, can definitely be contrasted to “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah.” **This latter concept composes Divine activity that secures a person’s redemption, and thus also membership among God’s people.** Our identity as brothers and sisters is not to be focused around what we do, or how we try to establish markers of who we are as a part of this sect or that clique—“works of law.” Rather, who we are is to find its center in the faithfulness that Yeshua demonstrated. He came to Earth on our behalf, as the Lamb of God sacrificed for our sins. *His faithfulness* was demonstrated “in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us” (Romans 5:8).

One would think that this interpretation of the genitive clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* would actually be met with great enthusiasm by many of today’s Believers. Do we not all love the Lord and how *He has saved us* from our sins?! Even if one views “works of law” according to the traditional meaning of “observing the law,” the “faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” is still Divine action performed on sinful humanity’s behalf. God is the One who does the saving!

Many New Testament theologians have embraced the point that “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is the correct reading of Galatians 2:16, and also Galatians 3:22; Romans 3:22; Philippians 3:9; and possibly Ephesians 3:12 (placed here in their likely order of composition).⁹ Not all are convinced, though,¹⁰ believing that “faith in Jesus Christ” is more appropriate. And perhaps ironically enough, those who seem to be the most pessimistic to the understanding of “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” to be the contrast to “works of law,” are frequently from the Reformed/Calvinist tradition.¹¹ If there is any theological strata we would think that should immediately embrace the “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” in saving people, especially with all of its emphasis upon God’s sovereignty and Divine action for fallen mortals, it would be Calvinism.

Somehow, those who often oppose “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” as being entirely legitimate, feel that the proposal of identity among God’s people, “justification” (in passages like Galatians 2:16), may undermine the doctrine of justification by faith—that remittance of sin comes by the trust people place in Yeshua. **This is not the case at all.** This is, rather, an overreaction, as the “justification” of being a member of God’s people—and not necessarily being redeemed from sin—really only concerns a few passages seen with the ancient issues originally addressed in Galatians and Romans. Is it possible that some people have simply quoted verses like Galatians 2:16 so many times, that they have difficulty seeing it from any other vantage point?

⁸ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 87.

⁹ Some level of the subjective genitive appears in David H. Stern’s Complete Jewish Bible. This includes the renderings “through the Messiah Yeshua’s trusting faithfulness” (Galatians 2:16), “on the basis of Yeshua the Messiah’s trusting faithfulness” (Galatians 3:22), “through the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” (Romans 3:22), “through the Messiah’s faithfulness” (Philippians 3:9), and “through his faithfulness” (Ephesians 3:12). The presence of a possible subjective genitive is also indicated in various footnotes in the Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—The New Covenant.

The subjective genitive appears in the referenced verses in N.T. Wright’s Kingdom New Testament version.

¹⁰ Among advocates of the New Perspective of Paul, this includes Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, pp 291-293.

¹¹ For a summarization of some of this debate, consult John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007) and N.T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

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If “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” is the correct rendering seen in certain Pauline passages, then how might our approach to these verses be altered? While there is certainly debate present among Christian scholars about this, how should it inform our developing Messianic approach to Paul’s letters, and what he might write to us were he living today? Let us examine the relevant verses where “faithfulness of...,” and not necessarily “faith in...,” can teach us some important lessons about who we are to be as followers of Yeshua.

Galatians 2:16

“nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Messiah Yeshua [*dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou*, διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ], even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, so that we may be justified by faith in Messiah [*ek pisteōs Christou*, ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ] and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

We should be quite familiar with the scene of Paul’s rebuke of Peter at Antioch, where he refuses to eat with the non-Jewish Believers (Galatians 2:12). According to Paul, by splitting up the assembly with this ungodly action, the non-Jewish Believers would have to “Judaize” (Galatians 2:14, YLT)—meaning undergo ritual conversion (cf. Esther 8:17, LXX)—in order for them to be able to join in with Peter and the Jewish Believers. Paul would have absolutely nothing to do with this, and accuses Peter that he should know better, as “We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles” (Galatians 2:15). Peter was acting toward the non-Jewish Believers the same way that pagans would be acting toward him (cf. Tacitus *The Histories* 5.5.1-2).¹²

Paul informs Peter that one’s justification—here directly related to being reckoned as a member of God’s people—does not come about via “works of law.” Peter withdrew himself from the non-Jewish Believers, following an overly-conservative *halachah*, thinking he was doing the right thing to be recognized as a faithful Jew. But Paul did not consider this attitude to be valid in order for one to be identified as a member of God’s people—and actually considered Peter to be a hypocrite in removing himself (Galatians 2:13). Contrary to “works of law” or man-made *halachic* regulations reckoning one as “justified,” the justification that is actually required is *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

Traditionally, this has been viewed as “through faith in Messiah Yeshua.” Hans Dieter Betz summarizes this as, “For the Apostle, ‘faith in Christ Jesus’ is faith in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.”¹³ None of us who read Galatians 2:16 would argue against the fact that born again Believers must recognize Yeshua the Messiah as crucified and physically resurrected to be redeemed. Yet the genitive clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* can mean “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah,” a significant Divine action that Paul contrasts to misguided human action. Aware of this, why would there be those who disagree with recognizing that here, Paul expects one to be reckoned as a member of God’s people on the basis of what Yeshua’s faithfulness has accomplished?

F.F. Bruce takes the position that “faith in Jesus Christ” is the correct understanding. He concludes, “The principal and, indeed conclusive argument for taking the genitive to be objective here is that, when Paul expresses himself by the verb πιστεύω and not the noun

¹² Tacitus, *The Histories*, 273.

¹³ Betz, 117.

πίστις”¹⁴ he describes “an action that people have to make. In his estimation, the usage of the verb *pisteuō* (πιστεύω), meaning to have faith or to believe, must determine how the preceding noun *pistis* is viewed.

When Paul says “even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua,” *kai hēmeis eis Christon Iēsoun episteusamen* (καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν), he asserts that since both he and Peter have placed their belief/faith/trust in Yeshua, so must it be the same for everyone else without exception. **Expressing faith in Yeshua is necessary for redemption, and thus being reckoned as a member of God’s people.** For many, since all people placing trust in Yeshua is the issue in this clause, the preceding clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* cannot be viewed as a subjective genitive, but has to be viewed as an objective genitive. James D.G. Dunn concurs with this view: “In short, the phrase is still best taken as expressing faith in Christ, that is, acceptance of the reliability of what was said by and about Christ.”¹⁵

None of us are in disagreement that in order to be redeemed and/or reckoned as a members of God’s people, acknowledgement of the principal acts of salvation, and believing in them, is required. The usage of the verb *pisteuō* makes this clear. Ben Witherington III agrees how “There is no doubt that Paul not only affirms faith *in* Christ, but sees it as an important matter (cf. Rom. 10:14; Phil. 1:29), as this very paragraph of Galatians shows.”¹⁶ But, in his Galatians commentary Witherington shows a strong preference for “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” being the correct view. Is the first clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou*, so directly affected by the second clause, where the verb *episteusamen* is used, that it has to be “faith *in* Yeshua the Messiah”? Not all are convinced.

If one chooses to take the position that “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah,” *His action for us*, is what is being contrasted to “works of law” —then it must be assumed that some kind of recognition of His crucifixion and resurrection has already been accomplished. “The faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” has to be qualified and defined by some kind of actions, after all. In reading Galatians 2:16 as first relating to Yeshua’s faithfulness, *the focus is simply shifted to awe of what He has done*, to then be followed with a proper response of how “even we have believed.” With Yeshua as the centerpiece of how He has died *for all*, there should be no “works of law” or *halachic* issues separating those who are to come together as fellow brothers and sisters in Him.

Longenecker describes how “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” is to properly work. He says, “Paul uses πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in his writings to signal the basis for the Christian gospel: that its objective basis is the perfect response of obedience that Jesus rendered to God the Father, both actively in his life and passively in his death.”¹⁷ If Yeshua gave Himself up for us via “faithfulness,” then we surely have the responsibility to believe in this.

For the sake of Paul’s argument to Peter, he was by no means speaking against having faith in Yeshua. His use of “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah,” rather, was specifically employed **to highlight where the *ekklēsia* needed to place its central attention.** As Paul further explains to Peter, “I have been crucified with Messiah...the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [*en pistei zō tē tou huiou tou Theou, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ*], who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20). *En pistei* or “in faith” is certainly a part of the equation, but not all of it. The faith we place in Yeshua is preceded by us recognizing the faithfulness Yeshua has demonstrated.

¹⁴ Bruce, *Galatians*, 139.

¹⁵ Dunn, *Galatians*, 139.

¹⁶ Witherington, *Galatians*, 179.

¹⁷ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 87.

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Richard B. Hays astutely puts this all together: “his death was an act that showed forth God’s faithfulness (cf. Rom 3:3), God’s determination not to abandon his people to slavery and death. This, when Paul writes that a person is rectified only *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou*, he is thinking of Christ’s faithfulness as embodied in his death on a cross.”¹⁸ Expressing belief in Yeshua’s sacrifice for us should come as a direct result of us clearly recognizing the pain and suffering that He endured on our behalf.

Galatians 3:21-22

“Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Yeshua the Messiah [*ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou*, ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] might be given to those who believe.”

Paul previously has asserted that the main reason for the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was, “It was added because of transgressions...until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made” (Galatians 3:19). Notable to be considered here is how *prostithēmi* (προστίθημι) primarily means “**to add to someth. that is already present or exists**” (BDAG).¹⁹ One of the main things that Sinai provided for Ancient Israel was a sacrificial system and priesthood, added to an already, pre-existent moral and ethical code. We are reminded of how “Abraham obeyed My voice, and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees, and My Torahs [*torotai*, תּוֹרָתַי]” (Genesis 26:5, ATS; cf. Sirach 44:19-20). This is why the CJB has “the legal part of the *Torah*” (discussed previously).

The giving of the Torah—including the sacrificial system to deal with human sin—is not at all contrary or opposed to the promises of God (Galatians 3:21a). In persuading his Galatian audience against going through with the Influencers’ proselyte circumcision, Paul must also dissuade them from thinking that in their keeping of any human-prescribed “works of law,” that their remittance of sin would similarly *not* be provided by any kind of Torah observance attendant with it (Galatians 3:21b). The principal purpose of the Scriptures, here relating to the Torah and Tanach, was to show how people are “imprisoned” (Galatians 3:22a, ESV) by their sin. The giving of the Torah was not intended to bring eternal life (Galatians 3:22b).

The reason that God’s Torah is not contrary to God’s promises is fairly clear (other than the obvious fact that they both originate from God). God must first use the Tanach Scriptures to reveal the sinfulness of humanity. When this has been adequately accomplished, then His promise to provide a Redeemer to permanently take care of the sin problem, as people are imprisoned via their disobedience of His commandments, can be enacted. And what does this promise involve? The promise is *ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), “from the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” (my translation). Longenecker further describes,

“Paul saw two strands of God-given material running throughout the Scriptures: (1) the law of God, which was given to highlight the true nature of sin and so bring sinful humanity under its curse; and (2) the promises of God, which have always called for a response of faith and are now focused in the faithfulness or obedience of Jesus Christ.”²⁰

¹⁸ Hays, in *NIB*, 240.

¹⁹ *BDAG*, 885.

²⁰ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 145.

Paul describes how “before faith came” into their lives—meaning the trust that one should place in Messiah Yeshua—“we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed” (Galatians 3:23). Before Yeshua’s faithfulness was recognized by them via the promise, all that the Torah could do was condemn both him and the Galatians as sinners. *This is life “under the law,”* shut up as criminals under the Torah’s penalties.²¹

Now, with Yeshua’s faithfulness manifest via His death and atoning sacrifice, the Torah’s condemnation upon sinners has been lifted. *When people acknowledge and believe this they can be saved!* The purpose of the Torah for unredeemed people is to show them their need for a Redeemer, having once served as a schoolmaster or strict disciplinarian for those on the road to saving faith (Galatians 3:24). God’s giving of the Torah was never to force people to earn salvation by keeping it, but rather show people the need for something greater: a permanent fix for the human sin problem being required (cf. Hebrews 10:1-7). When any of us read the Torah and Tanach, **we need to understand how a major trajectory of it is the promise that is totally manifested in Yeshua’s faithfulness unto death.** Hays similarly observes,

“In such a desperate situation, the only hope is for God to act. That was precisely God’s design, and God did act through Christ’s faithful death to liberate us from the power of sin and the present evil age.”²²

The motive, for obeying God’s commandments as a born again Believer, is in recognizing “that faith has come” (Galatians 3:25a). The tutor has performed its job well, showing us our need for salvation, because without Divine intervention all we will be is condemned. Being people of the New Covenant, transformed by God’s Spirit, He will write His commandments onto the transformed heart (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:26). Being saved, we will obey the Father as we strive to emulate the Son’s faithfulness, and mature in the new relationship that we have. And, we will know that such obedience comes because He wants us to be holy and set-apart, *not* that we feel that Yeshua’s faithfulness demonstrated for us is insufficient.²³

Romans 3:21-22

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Yeshua the Messiah [dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou, διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.”

Previously in Romans 3:19-20, Paul has chastised the misuse of the Torah by many of the Jews in his day. He speaks of how “whatever the Law says, it speaks to those within the Law [*en tō nomō lalei, ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ*]” (Romans 3:19a, LITV), meaning those who sit within its sphere and have it informing them on a frequent basis. To those in the sphere of God’s Torah, it is to instruct them “that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God” (Romans 3:19b). The Jewish people of Paul’s day were to know this purpose of the Torah—that the Lord will hold all people to account if they disobey it—and they should have been able to reflect this in their approach to the greater world, by wanting to see *all redeemed*.

Contrary to this, though, much of the First Century Jewish community had turned God’s Torah into human-originated “works of law,” or varied *halachot* designed to keep people out of

²¹ Be sure to have read Chapter 10, “What Does ‘Under the Law’ Really Mean?”

²² Hays, in *NIB*, 11:269.

²³ For a further discussion, consult the author’s exegetical paper on Galatians 3:24-25, “Are Messianic Youth Properly Trained in the Torah and All the Scriptures?”

For a further examination of the relevant issues, consult the author’s commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

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membership in Israel—something quite contrary to His actual purpose in the Torah. To this Paul says, “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Romans 3:20a). Many of the *halachot* that the ancient Jews established for themselves—actually took them away from telling the world they were accountable for sin (Romans 3:20b). *Such rulings are not at all sufficient to be justified.* Human originated “works of Law” inevitably cause people to forget the obvious mandate upon Ancient Israel to be the blessing that is written about in the Torah, and according to Paul, actually merit a penalty (Galatians 3:8, 10; cf. Deuteronomy 27:26).

To many Jews of the First Century, their identity was less concerned about the requirement for Ancient Israel to be a blessing (cf. Genesis 12:2; Deuteronomy 4:6), and more in how the Torah made them separate and special—forgetting how it condemned all people equally, *especially them.* While the Torah was certainly inspired as the Word of God, it had in various sectors taken on such a prominent role of national identity (in no small part due to the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E.),²⁴ that sometimes thinking of spirituality independent from the Torah was difficult. This is precisely, though, what Paul wanted the Jews he addressed in Romans to recognize.

What does Paul say? He says, “now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested” (Romans 3:21a). Many readers take “righteousness of God” to just be the salvation of God provided in His Son. While this is by no means excluded, *dikaiosunē Theou* (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) as appearing here is best understood to relate to the activity of God in vindicating people. The “righteousness of God” as relating to the vindication of God in delivering His people is something seen throughout the Tanach, in varied uses of *tzedaqah* (צְדָקָה). TWOT summarizes,

“God is characterized as right in delivering his people (Psa 85:9-11 [H 10-1]); Psa 97:2)...Because God is always righteous, his saving action is properly signified by his righteous right hand (Isa 41:10). His saving righteousness is expressed with judgment, fidelity, and love (Psa 36:6-7 [H 7-8]) and with power (Psa 71:19). Those who experience this deliverance celebrate it in song (Psa 40; 10 [H 11]; Psa 71:15-16).”²⁵

Considering an appropriate meaning of “righteousness of God,” Douglas J. Moo accurately describes, “Paul is...prepared to explain how the righteousness of God—his eschatological justifying activity—empowers the gospel to mediate salvation to sinful human beings.”²⁶ The righteousness of God, here in Romans 3:21a, is not to be understood as God’s justice, **but instead His ability to intervene in a very desperate situation.** Up until this point in history, the major event of God’s righteousness that guided the Jewish ethos was the Exodus. Now (Grk. *Numi*, *nuni*), in something apart from the Torah, that same righteousness has revealed itself. **The major event—now—that Paul is obviously thinking of is the death and resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah for human sin.** But contrary to Paul saying that this event negates the importance of the Torah, Paul says it is surely “witnessed by the Law and the Prophets” (Romans 3:21b). Without the Tanach Scriptures, you have no “Messiah event.” N.T. Wright further comments,

“[I]t carries all the flavor of Paul’s inexhaustible excitement at what God had done in Jesus the Messiah. It was, after all, news: not a new religion, nor a new ethic, but an event through which the world, Paul himself, and the situation described in 3:19-20 had been changed forever.”²⁷

²⁴ Consult the author’s article “The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism,” appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

²⁵ Harold G. Stigers, “צְדָקָה (root),” in *TWOT*, 2:754.

²⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 219.

²⁷ Wright, in *NIB*, 469.

What had been changed forever? The previous reality that “all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19b, KJV). *The penalties of sin have been remitted via the cross* (Colossians 2:14). The dilemma of reducing the Torah to man-made “works of law” that keep people out can be changed. Via the power of the New Covenant writing the Torah onto human hearts by the Spirit, God’s people can live out the Torah fulfilled by Yeshua’s example (Matthew 5:17-19). God’s righteousness has revealed itself in something independent from the Torah, but something by no means contrary to the Torah. Moo comments how,

“From God’s side, this includes his eschatological intervention to vindicate and deliver his people, in fulfillment of his promises. From the human side, it includes the status of acquittal acquired by the person so declared just.”²⁸

Romans 3:22 states how the righteousness of God has been manifest to humankind: “the righteousness of God *is* through the faith of Jesus Christ to all, and upon all those believing, -- for there is no difference” (YLT). Here, the clause of interest is *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), which the CJB does render as “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah.” The vindication of God upon a sinful world, accountable before Him, is shown in the life of Yeshua—One who gave Himself up for our sins. The reason there is no difference between Jews and any others **is because Yeshua’s faithfulness affects all people**.

We should not be surprised how there are Romans commentators who are not convinced that “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is the correct view here. Dunn’s view is, “Christ’s faithfulness is not something which Paul draws attention to elsewhere in the extended exposition of Romans.”²⁹ But, this is *exactly* what Paul does later in Romans 5:6-11, explaining how through the death of Yeshua, we have “been justified by His blood....saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Romans 5:9). Moo actually does acknowledge that looking at *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* as a subjective genitive clause in Romans 3:22, is something that has to be exegetically considered, even though he still favors the traditional view of it being an objective genitive:

“Advocates of this interpretation argue that it is the more likely linguistically and that it makes better sense in the context....Despite...arguments, the traditional interpretation of the phrase is preferable...While the Greek word *pistis* can mean ‘faithfulness’ (see 3:3), and Paul can trace our justification to the obedience of Christ (5:19), little in this section of Romans would lead us to expect a mention of Christ’s ‘active obedience’ as basic to our justification.”³⁰

Moo only looks at the immediate verse for evidence that “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is the correct view of the genitive clause, and not the larger message of Romans. Similar to Galatians 2:16, this conclusion may be supported by a following use of the verb *pisteuō*, in the phrase “for all those who believe” (Romans 3:22b), *eis pantas tous pisteuontas* (εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας). Witherington, however, does not agree, arguing that “both objective and subjective means are referred to: the righteousness of God is revealed through the faithfulness of Christ (i.e., through the Christ-event), and it is revealed to all those who believe...This reading gives proper force to the two prepositions ‘through’ and ‘unto’...”³¹ The “faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” demonstrated for us *is the very reason why people believe the gospel*.

People choose to believe in the righteousness of God made manifest by Yeshua’s faithfulness. Paul says further on in Romans 3:26 that God declares “him righteous who *is* of the faith of Jesus” (YLT), *ek pisteōs Iēsou* (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ). The Divine action of “the faithfulness of Yeshua” is to be clearly contrasted with the human action of *ex ergōn nomou* (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) or

²⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 222.

²⁹ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:166.

³⁰ Moo, *Romans*, pp 224, 225.

³¹ Witherington, *Romans*, 101.

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by “works of law,” where justification cannot be found (Romans 3:20). Wright further comments,

“The train of thought is clearer [for this matter] if we read [Romans 3:22] as ‘through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, for the benefit of all who believe.’ This then corresponds closely to...[how in Romans 1:17]: from God’s faithfulness to answering human faith.”³²

Wright interprets Romans 1:17, where Paul refers to how “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith,” *ek pisteōs eis pistin* (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν), as relating “from God’s faithfulness to human faithfulness.” He concludes, “When God’s action in fulfillment of the covenant is unveiled, it is because God is faithful to what has been promised; when it is received, it is received by that human faith that answers to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”³³ This is by no means denouncing the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith, but “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” in Romans 3:22 enables us to look more specifically at the issues Paul addressed, to an audience that was divided over various ethnic issues between its Jewish and non-Jewish constituents.

It might be better, though, for us to consider Romans 1:17 from the perspective of the initial saving moment of faith—something understood by people recognizing Yeshua’s faithfulness in dying for sinful humanity—leading to greater faith as one grows and matures in his or her relationship with God, which surely also involves obedience to Him.

Similar to how “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” was to be the common denominator to unite the Believers in Antioch (Galatians 2:16), **so was it to be the common denominator among the diverse groups of Roman Believers as well.**³⁴ Because of various sectarian “works of law” (Romans 3:19-20) that were designed to keep people out, and fierce Jewish nationalism often associated with the Torah, God’s righteousness has had to act in a significant event separate from the Torah (Romans 3:21). Paul considers this Messiah event to be so significant, seen in Yeshua’s faithfulness by dying for humanity, that it is,

“[F]or all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Messiah Yeshua; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed” (Romans 3:22b-25).

Any of the Jewish Believers in Rome who might cling onto any sectarian “works of law” or *halachah* to keep non-Jewish Believers separate, cannot do so any more, and have no reason to boast (Romans 3:27). One’s justification—either his identity as a part of God’s people and/or forgiveness from sins—cannot be found in them (Romans 3:28). That these “works of law” would keep people separate is clear from how Paul strongly asserts that God is God of both the Jews and nations (Romans 3:29), and how both are reckoned justified via their faith (Romans 3:30). And God’s Torah still does remain important for people who place their trust in what Yeshua has accomplished: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Romans 3:31, RSV).³⁵ But the focal point of the *ekklesia*, and what is to bind it together, **is what Yeshua has done for all of us!** Those who believe in this find what is to hold them together, as fellow brothers and sisters who have partaken of redemption.

³² Wright, in *NIB*, 10:470.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10:425.

³⁴ A careful reading of Romans 16 shows how the people Paul greets are likely various leaders of sub-congregations/assemblies in Rome, which were probably not (often) getting along (from time to time).

³⁵ For a further examination of the relevant issues, consult the author’s commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

Philippians 3:8-9

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Messiah [*dia pisteōs Christou*, διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ], the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith [*tēn ek Theou dikaiosunēn epī tē pistei*, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει].”

It is undeniable that in reading Philippians, a major theme of Paul’s letter is the centrality of Yeshua the Messiah in his life: “For to me, to live is Messiah...” (Philippians 1:21). It should not be surprising that in detailing his human pedigree and accomplishments (Philippians 3:4-6), Paul must conclude “whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah” (Philippians 3:7). If Paul can consider his human righteousness derived from God’s Torah to be rubbish, then what would this mean to the Philippian Believers, many of whom could have been former soldiers who had retired to the Roman military colony at Philippi? Rhetorically speaking, the effect could have been: *If my Torah-based achievements are rubbish, your Roman “achievements” mean even less than rubbish!*

Paul tells the Philippians that “not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*” (Philippians 3:9a), *ek nomou* (ἐκ νόμου), he desires it to be *dia pisteōs Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ). This is traditionally viewed as “through faith in Christ.” Gerald F. Hawthorne summarizes, “Faith...in its strictest sense is not intellectual assent to a series of propositions about Christ, but the act of personal trust in and self-surrender to Christ. It is the movement of one’s whole soul in confidence out toward Christ.”³⁶ None of us can disagree with this, nor can we disagree with how Paul expects the Philippians to place their trust in Yeshua. The issue is what Paul is *specifically* contrasting his former activity of possessing a human righteousness, derived from the Torah, to.

Linguistically speaking, Peter T. O’Brien argues that “faithfulness of Christ” is the best understanding for the genitive clause appearing in Philippians 3:9. His conclusions are principally supported by previous examples seen in Galatians and Romans, noting that in favor of the subjective genitive,

“In the Pauline corpus πίστις followed by the genitive of a person (using either a noun or personal pronoun) occurs twenty-four times...Twenty of these refer to the faith of [Believers] (either individually or collectively), one to the πίστις of God (Rom. 3:3), two to the faith(fulness) of Abraham (Rom. 4:12, 16), and one to the person whose faith is reckoned for righteousness...Most importantly, the expression ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ] (Rom. 3:26; Gal. 3:22) has an exact parallel in Rom. 4:16, ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ, which is certainly subjective. Moreover, ‘the use of *pistis* in Hellenistic Jewish literature as a whole supports the subjective genitive’.”³⁷

Not all Philippians commentators are agreed that *dia pisteōs Christou* is a subjective genitive clause, “through the faithfulness of Messiah,” and is instead an objective genitive clause speaking of “through faith in Messiah.” Hawthorne comments, “when Paul writes of the righteousness which is διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ (lit. ‘through faith of Christ’) one must take the

³⁶ Hawthorne, 141.

³⁷ O’Brien, *Philippians*, pp 398, 399.

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genitive Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive...Paul does not have in mind here a righteousness that is based on the faithfulness, loyalty or fidelity of Christ to the Father."³⁸

Gordon D. Fee similarly concludes that it is best to understand *dia pisteōs Christou* as "something that we 'do'; we put our trust in Christ."³⁹ He concurs with those who see later usage of the verb *pisteuō*, occurring in Galatians 2:16 (discussed previously), as affecting the first usage of *pistis*—although what we see in Philippians 3:9 is the noun *pistis* being used twice. Fee argues that theologically, "nowhere does Paul unambiguously refer to our salvation as 'through Christ's faithfulness,' whereas he repeatedly and unambiguously so speaks of our faith. To make this genitive subjective, therefore, would seem to require stronger evidence than has been thus far presented."⁴⁰ Fee, not only as a theologian, but also as a significant continuist who believes that the gifts of the Spirit are for today—would by no means argue against the importance of recognizing Yeshua's obedience to the Father unto death as being the source of our righteousness. He is just unconvinced that the exegetical evidence supports the understanding "faithfulness of Messiah" in Philippians 3:9.

What we have to strongly consider here is how Paul's human accomplishments are indeed meaningless in light of what Yeshua has done for him. Paul attests, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord...and count them but rubbish" (Philippians 3:8). Paul has already stated why he considers knowing Yeshua as his Lord to be so supreme *to what he can do as a mortal*. Yeshua emptied Himself of His exalted glory in Heaven, coming to die for sinful humanity. Just as all in Isaiah 45:21-23 are to acknowledge the LORD God as Savior bowing their knee—so must Yeshua the Messiah be worshipped as LORD (Philippians 2:5-11). The righteousness, which Paul desires in his life, is one that comes precisely because one has placed his or her trust in what has been demonstrated by Yeshua's faithfulness.

O'Brien describes how, theologically for the Apostle Paul, there is significant support for us understanding *dia pisteōs Christou* as "through the faithfulness of Messiah." He summarizes, "Jesus' obedience plays a central role in Paul's theology (Rom. 5:18-19), not least in Philippians (ὑπέκοος [*hupēkoos*], 2:8)...If this line of interpretation is correct, then the apostle is asserting that the righteousness he possesses is based on Christ's faithful obedience to the Father—clear proof that Paul's right relationship with God comes through sheer grace."⁴¹

Simply because Paul's righteousness comes "through the faithfulness of Messiah," Divine action performed on his behalf, does not at all mean that Paul does not have to do anything. Paul says that this righteousness he must possess is "the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Philippians 3:9b, RSV), *epi tē pistei* (ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει). Paul has to place his faith and trust in what the Messiah's faithfulness has accomplished on the cross. Morna D. Hooker further explains,

"[W]e should note that at the end of [v. 9], Paul spells out the fact that the righteousness he has in Christ comes to him through faith: Is he simply repeating himself? This final phrase—'based on/by faith'—is not balanced by any comparable phrase about the righteousness that comes from the law, and it is difficult to explain why Paul should think it necessary to repeat the reference to faith if he has already said that the righteousness from God comes to us through *our* faith in Christ."⁴²

³⁸ Hawthorne, 141.

³⁹ Fee, *Philippians*, 325, fn #44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ O'Brien, *Philippians*, pp 399-400.

⁴² Morna D. Hooker, "The Letter to the Philippians," in *NIB*, 11:528.

Hooker then goes on to conclude that “the faithfulness of Christ” is the best understanding for *pisteōs Christou*, given His work for us as the source of righteousness. This is something which requires people to act in faith toward what He has accomplished.

Many who read Philippians 3:9 think that the Apostle Paul is disparaging the Torah, when in fact he is not. What he is trying to communicate is that who Paul is, is “found in Him,” and that he specifically does not want to have “a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*.” This is a righteousness that would come from his own human achievements involved with the Torah. Contrary to this, the righteousness that Paul desires to have is from the “faithfulness of Messiah,” **what Yeshua has accomplished for him as the crucified and resurrected Lord**. The Torah by no means is something to be discarded; it is simply not to be the locus of a person’s righteousness. Obeying God’s commandments, rather, is a part of learning to be holy in one’s behavior (1 Peter 1:15-16).⁴³

Ephesians 3:11-12

“This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Messiah Yeshua our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him [dia tēs pisteōs autou, διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ].”

The final usage of a debated genitive clause appears in Paul’s general epistle to the Believers of Asia Minor called “Ephesians,” a principal purpose of which is to describe how God’s mystery of the ages has been manifested in Yeshua. This mystery concerns the creation of the “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV/CJB) by Jewish and non-Jewish Believers becoming one in Him (Ephesians 3:4-6), and of which Paul was made a steward (Ephesians 3:7). The reconciliation of all people groups to one another in the Lord Yeshua is to testify of the greater redemption to come to the cosmos (Ephesians 3:10).

God’s great plan for the ages is labeled as “his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:11b, NIV). It is in Yeshua that Believers “have bold and confident access” (Ephesians 3:12) to the Father, a reiteration of what Paul previously states in Ephesians 2:18: “for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.” Similarly the author of Hebrews attests, “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16).

Anyone who reads Ephesians recognizes that it is by expressing faith in Yeshua that people are redeemed (Ephesians 2:8). This redemptive trust in the Messiah enables Believers on Earth to have close access to the presence of the Father in Heaven, where Yeshua presently intercedes (Hebrews 4:14-15). Bruce correctly recognizes, “As his place in the presence of God is unchallengeable, so is theirs, because they are ‘in him’.”⁴⁴

But which is the clause that describes Believers being “in Him,” meaning in Yeshua? Is it the ending clause of Ephesians 3:12, or one of the preceding clauses? Andrew T. Lincoln simply concludes it is “διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ, ‘through faith in him,’ [which] indicates the means by which believers appropriate the new situation for themselves.”⁴⁵ The phrase *dia tēs pisteōs autou* (διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ) is just to be viewed the objective genitive “through faith in Him.”

But there are already preceding clauses that describe being “in Him.” Ephesians 3:11 specifies, *en tō Christō Iēsou tō Kuriō hēmōn* (ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν) or “in the

⁴³ For a further examination of the relevant issues, consult the author’s commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁴⁴ Bruce, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, 322.

⁴⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, Vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 190.

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Messiah Yeshua, our Lord” (CJB). In the Messiah, here specified by name, the Father’s eternal purpose for the ages has been carried out. It is “by grace...through faith” (Ephesians 2:8), *gar chariti...dia pisteōs* (γὰρ χάριτι...διὰ πίστεως), that we acknowledge ourselves as beneficiaries of what has been accomplished by Him. The way the Father’s purpose was made evident, however, “through His faithfulness.”

We consider *dia tēs pisteōs autou* in Ephesians 3:12 to correctly be understood as a subjective genitive, speaking of Yeshua’s faithful obedience to the Father, being the means by which His ends have been achieved (Ephesians 3:11b). O’Brien concurs,

“Once again the centrality of Christ is to the fore: the phrase ‘in whom’, referring to him, appears at the beginning of [v. 12], indicating that it is only in their union with him that [Believers] have this confident access to God, while the concluding words ‘through his [sc., Christ’s] faithfulness’ focus on his obedience to the Father’s will as the means by which this marvellous privilege of coming to the throne of grace is provided.”⁴⁶

Witherington’s thoughts on what Yeshua’s faithfulness has accomplished are also excellent:

“In v. 12b the *dia* [διὰ] phrase could mean ‘because of faith in him,’ but more likely it means ‘because of his faithfulness’ as elsewhere in Paul, as the end of v. 11 suggests, which says it was realized ‘in Christ.’ It is due to the finished work of Christ that the prayer lines and access to the throne room have been made available.”⁴⁷

It is not only by the faithfulness of Yeshua—His obedience to die for human sin—that non-Jewish people can become equal members of Israel along with their Jewish brothers and sisters (Ephesians 2:13), but more importantly that **we can all have access** to the Throne in Heaven via prayer and intercession. Knowing the gravity of His faithfulness, should not only cause us to turn in trust to the Lord, but generate a desire to know how we can declare this life-changing truth to all Creation!⁴⁸

The Faithfulness of Yeshua—Contrasted to Side Issues

Looking back on the original question posed in Galatians 2:16, is our justification or identity as God’s people to be focused around man-made “works of law”? Or, is it to be focused around the “faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” **and what the Lord has accomplished for us?**

I would submit to you that going through the various passages where the faithfulness of Yeshua—His obedience to the Father unto death on our behalf—is a very important exercise for each one of us as Messianic Believers. *All too frequently, our spiritual identity is not focused on His faithfulness.* All too frequently, our spiritual identity as a still-maturing and emerging Messianic movement is focused on various side issues, almost always of our own making. These are things that take our attention off of the gospel of salvation, and away from really sitting down and considering what He endured as the Son of God sacrificed for our sins. How many of us, if asked what Revelation 14:12 really communicates, would have a blank stare on our faces?

“Here is endurance of the saints: here are those keeping the commands of God, and the faith of Jesus” (YLT).

Within Revelation 14:12, we see that the end-time Believers are not only those who highly value the instruction of God’s Torah, but they also know the significance of *tēn pistin Iēsou* (τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ) or “Yeshua’s faithfulness” (CJB). Is today’s generation of Messianic Believers a

⁴⁶ Peter T. O’Brien, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 249.

⁴⁷ Witherington, *Philemon-Colossians-Ephesians*, 268.

⁴⁸ For a further examination of the relevant issues, consult the author’s commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

group of people that can carefully and properly balance obedience to Moses' Teaching, with recognizing the significance of Yeshua's faithfulness to die for sinful humanity?

With the 2010s upon us, a new decade of significant hope and advancement has arrived for our broad Messianic faith community. I have looked at the 2010s with a great sense of optimism and enthusiasm.⁴⁹ The time for us to grow up, and transition away from just a movement and into a force of righteousness is coming. Yet in order to get there, some tenuous things may take place. Major disputes and battles may be soon coming to our faith community that could very well tear at its heart and soul. **If this is the case, we need to know where the center of who we are is focused.** Just consider some of the things that have been going on in the Messianic world the past few years—all across the spectrum—and you will see how important it is that we have Yeshua at the center of our being:

- Debate over whether the Messianic movement should transform itself into becoming a formally recognized branch of Judaism, or whether it should learn to embody the original purposes given to Ancient Israel as a light to the nations, a missional community that is to surely impact the Jewish people who do not know Yeshua the Messiah *and* the world around it with God's goodness.
- Debate over a bilateral ecclesiology where God has one plan and requirements for living for Messianic Jews, and another plan and requirements for living for Gentile Christians. The two peoples are "separate, but equal," although it would be best for most non-Jews (possibly excluding intermarrieds) who are a part of the Messianic movement to vacate it and go back to Church.
- Debate over whether it is legitimate for us to consider Medieval Jewish mystical thought, and Kabbalistic literature, as representing the actual thoughts and worldview of Yeshua and His Apostles in the First Century C.E. Or, whether we need to do more thorough homework regarding the complex Mediterranean background (Jewish *and* classical Greco-Roman) of the Messianic Scriptures (New Testament).
- Debate over how today's Messianic Believers should approach the role of the Torah as God's Instruction for their lives. Is Torah-keeping for God's people some kind of Divine Invitation that can be refused, or a Covenant Obligation to be forced upon them as strict rules and regulations? *Or*, is Torah-keeping to be the result of a Supernatural Compulsion, as the Holy Spirit changes the hearts and minds of the redeemed, stimulating obedience to the commandments by the promise of the New Covenant and the power God's of sanctifying grace?
- Debate over a populist Two-House teaching which advocates that almost every non-Jew drawn into embracing his or her Hebraic Roots and a Torah lifestyle is a physical Israelite, versus emphasizing that all Believers are an equal part of the Commonwealth of Israel via their faith in Yeshua, and regardless of the finer details, that prophecies like Ezekiel 37:15-28 are futuristic and unfulfilled.
- Debate over extreme end-of-the-world hype and sensationalism associated with the Middle East Peace Process, nuclear weapons in Iran, Mayan calendar predictions, recalculations of recalculations of Date X for the Second Coming and a highly packaged 6,000-year doctrine, and immediate expectations of a "Greater Exodus"—all combined with extreme fear and paranoia and isolationism.

⁴⁹ Consult some of the excellent thoughts appearing in the January 2010 issue of Outreach Israel News, "The Coming Decade."

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Easily added to this list, of course, would be the fact that the Messianic community will have to always confront “works of law” sectarianism via improper *halachah*, legalism where people will falsely think that salvation comes by their human Torah observance, and having to find a safe equilibrium in respecting our shared Jewish and Christian heritage. We also have to formulate solutions as to how our Biblical Studies and engagement with contemporary theology should improve.

I could probably say more things about various side issues, but with some spiritual and theological uncertainties at our doorstep, **there is no better time for us to focus on Yeshua and what He has done for us!** When the battles come, will we have a firm anchoring in the work of the Lord?

A Forgotten Emphasis?

Is the “faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” a forgotten emphasis for many of us? I remind you that it is not enough to just acknowledge Yeshua as Messiah to be redeemed. The half-brother of the Lord himself says, “the demons also believe, and shudder” (James 2:19). Yeshua has done something marvelous by dying for our sins—and we need to respond to this favorably. This favorable response to the work of Yeshua on our behalf is not just recognizing that He is the promised Messiah of Israel, but as the Apostle Paul wrote, “For to me, to live is Messiah and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). **That is what the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah meant to him.**

What does the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah mean to you? *Only you can answer this.* I simply leave you with some (overlooked) Scripture passages, which I think best assemble what He has done for us. When was the last time you meditated on these words, and how He has secured our complete redemption?

“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with

The Faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah

the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53).

"Then Yeshua came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.' And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will'" (Matthew 26:36-39).

"In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage⁵⁰; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5-11, TNIV; cf. Isaiah 45:21-23).

⁵⁰ While rendered elsewhere as "grasped" (Philippians 2:6, NASU/NIV), the noun *harpagmos* (ἄρπαγμός) best means "something to which one can claim or assert title by gripping or grasping, *someh. claimed*" (BDAG, 133). The NRSV renders this "as something to be exploited."