

Paul's Haircut

There are some great lessons that can be learned from examining a controversy, about the length of the apostle Paul's hair. One of the arguments anti-Pauline theologians use to re-invent Paul as a *Torah observant Rabbi*, is based on his Nazarite vow. Paul let his hair grow at Corinth, to fulfill a vow, which some try to claim as evidence that Mosaic laws must be followed by Christians. Others claim, that Paul was never a *Christian*, since he continued to observe Jewish customs.

*Some Messianic Jewish theologians have faulted the apostle Paul for the "Pauline Gospels" claiming it to be anti-Semitic. Most anti-Pauline Messianic Jewish theologians have avoided taking an anti-Pauline stand and have **re-invented Paul** and his writings as that of the "Torah observant Rabbi Paul, all accepting of modern Messianic Jewish thought." Such a re-invention is both **doctrinally unsound and historically incorrect.** <http://www.messianic-literary.com/teaching1.htm>*

Under the Old Covenant, this was the law concerning the Nazarite vow:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: ... All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. (Numbers 6: 2, 5)

Ge 28:20, Le 27:2, 1Sa 1:11, 2Sa 15:7 are further examples of vows in the Old Testament

The location where Paul took the vow was Corinth, the capital of the province of Achaia, which was a city of religious diversity - including a significant number of Jews. In 49 C.E., the Jews were expelled from Rome and a good number migrated to Corinth, including Aquila and Prisca. Paul worked with them making tents and trained them to be key leaders of the Church. (Acts 18:1-12, 1 Cor. 16:19) At Corinth like most places Paul traveled, he tried to win Gentiles and Jews alike.

Paul revealed his true teaching regarding hair length, to the Church in Corinth:

*1Cor 11.14-5 Does not nature itself teach you that **if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him**, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?*

How can his teaching be reconciled to the Old Covenant law (and his own behavior), in taking a vow at Corinth. If you know the freedom we have in Christ (under the new Covenant) the answer becomes obvious. Let us let Paul answer for **himself**.

*1 Corinthians 9:19-23 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to **win** as many as possible. **To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.***

Take note of an important concept here. Paul distinguished himself from the Jews, by saying he was

not **under the law** (of Moses), but said he was not free of **God's law**, since he was now under the **law of Christ**. However, at times, he behaved like a Jew under the law, in order to win them.

Let's look at how the conflict over the law was handled by the early Church council, to shed some light on this.

*Acts 21:19 After greeting them (James and the elders – the early Church council), Paul related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard about it, **they praised God***

They had no problem with Paul teaching **not** to observe the law. However, they then related how that many Jews had also believed - who were zealous for the law - which created a dilemma.

*Acts 21:21 But they (the Jewish believers in Jerusalem) have been told about you—that you teach all the **Jews** living among the Gentiles to **forsake the Law of Moses**, and that you tell them **not to circumcise their children** or **observe the customs**. What is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.*

Note that Paul was not only teaching Gentiles **not** to observe the **law**, but also **Jews** and the council praised his Ministry in verse 19. They had no problem with the teaching itself, but the anger it was instilling in the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, was a cause of great concern.

Some people try to get around this verse, by saying the Asian Jews were simply making a false report about him. However, anyone with eyes can read Paul's teachings for themselves and see that he did indeed teach that the Covenant with Moses was temporary - added to the Covenant with Abraham **until** the promised seed (Christ) came. Then the law was fulfilled in Christ and nailed to the pole.

Galatians 3:19 *What, then, was the **purpose of the law**? It was **added** because of transgressions **until** the **Seed** (Christ) to whom the promise referred had come. 25 Now that faith has come, we are **no longer under the supervision of the law** 29 And if ye are Christ's, **then** are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise.*

Hebrews 7:11 *For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a **change of the law**.*

Colossians 2:13 *Then he kindly forgave all our errors and wiped away the **handwritten Law** that held us down and oppressed us. He lifted it out of the way and **nailed it on the pole**.*

They (the council) explain their plan for dealing with the potentially explosive situation, which was to use tact. They knew Paul's life would have been in danger and the survival of the fledgling Church would have been imperiled, if he provoked the Jews into a riot of persecution against them.

Acts 21:23 *So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a **vow**. Take these men, go through the **purification ceremony** with them, and pay their expenses to **shave their heads**. Then everyone will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you are carefully observing and keeping the law.*

They also had no problem with acting like a Jew in order to win Jews (or pacify them), since they knew the law was abolished (it was irrelevant now that the New Covenant was established by Christ). However, their tactic failed, the *horse was already out of the barn*, Paul was already **infamous** (among

the Judaizers) for teaching the Gospel. He deeply offended the Jewish believers **who did not yet understand that the covenant with Moses was temporary, replaced and abolished by the New Covenant.** (Galatians 3:19, Hebrews 7:11, Hebrews 9:15, Romans 7:6, Galatians 4:21-31, etc.)

Despite his efforts to win them over, Paul was still attacked later by the Jews, even though he took great care to observe their customs - as to not offend them.

Acts 28:17 *"My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans*

There are two ways, in which this was a true statement:

1. Their ancestors had prophesied about the coming Messiah and righteousness **apart from law.** It was the Judaizers (not Paul), who had disregarded their ancestors. (John 5:46-47, Romans 3:21-22).
2. Paul made great efforts to keep the Jewish customs (when around Jews), as to not offend them, while his real intent was to win them over to the New Covenant.

Now before we judge Paul and the council for being hypocrites (believing one way and acting another), we must ask a question. Is it morally wrong to meet people at their level? Is it acceptable to take the attitude *when in Rome do as the Romans do*? Is it acceptable to play Chameleon, if your motive is to win souls by doing so? Remember, Paul himself says that it is so.

1 Corinthians 9:19 *To the Jews I became **like** a Jew, to **win** the Jews. To those under the **law** I became **like one under the law** (though I myself **am not under the law**), so as to **win those under the law.***

Salvation of souls, was Paul's motivation in behaving this way. He also made it crystal clear that under the New Covenant - keeping or not keeping such customs was irrelevant.

Galatians 6:15 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

Therefore, when he observed the Jewish customs, it was not that he was doing something wrong - he was doing something irrelevant (in that that the Mosaic law was obsolete).

However, he was dead set against exercising his New Covenant freedom, when it led the weak astray.

1 Corinthians 8:9 *Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak* (speaking of the avoidance of food sacrificed to idols, which is another example of a Mosaic law that meant nothing under the New Covenant).

What **did** made the Mosaic law a big issue for Paul, is when people tried to teach that it had to be kept **in order to be saved.** They were *Judaizers* and of course Paul **opposed** any such notion. If you kept the Jewish laws as Paul did, knowing that they meant nothing under the New Covenant, in a situation that did not lead the weak astray, but with the intent of not offending the Jews - so as to win as many as possible – there is nothing morally wrong with that.

James, by the way, makes it clear that he understood that the Mosaic law did not need to be kept for

salvation, in the very passage where he told Paul go through the purification ceremony. He told Paul to continue on as he had been (outside of Jerusalem, in Gentile cities) and praised God for his Ministry – **(which taught both Jews and Gentiles not to keep the law)** but he placed a few meaningless restrictions on the Gentiles (to help pacify the Jewish believers and diffuse the situation).

At the meeting, Peter makes the definitive statement that **all** are saved by faith, not by the yoke of Mosaic law.

Acts 15: 10-11 *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear (Mosaic law)? But we believe that through the **grace** of the LORD Jesus Christ **we** (converts from Judaism) shall be saved, even as **they** (Gentile converts).*

James (the brother of Christ) was the head of the Church, which operated out of Jerusalem. He had the delicate task of undoing centuries of customs and traditions that were firmly ingrained. The Jewish believers had to be weaned off of the Old Covenant and made to accept the New Covenant. That was a **volatile situation** that had to be handled slowly, carefully, with *kid gloves*. There was a real danger of provoking the Jews and being exterminated before the Church had a chance to win them over. He did the right thing, the only thing he could do, to ensure the survival of the Christian movement amongst the Jews – he used tact. Don't confuse tact with "Judaizing". The "Judaizers" believed and taught that keeping the law (of Moses) was **necessary** for salvation, and James did not believe or teach that.

In regard to Paul opposing Peter (Galatians 2:11- 14) - what was the issue? It happened at Antioch, which was a Gentile city (which also had a significant Jewish population), where Paul had the authority to preach the *straight goods* without fear of provoking a widespread persecution like at Jerusalem. Along came some from James, who had apparently not yet been weaned off the Old Covenant (touchy stuff in Jerusalem). Peter *out of fear* would not eat with the Gentiles in front of them (taboo to "Judaizers") and as a result, leads the Jews that were present, and even Barnabas astray, so that they too follow his bad example. Of course Paul opposed this. The issue here was whether keeping the law was **necessary** for salvation.

Galatians 2:16, 21 *...for **no human being will be justified by doing what the law requires** ...I do not misapply God's grace, for if righteousness comes about by doing what the law requires, then the Messiah died for nothing*

Peter was not keeping the law as Paul did in Jerusalem, or Corinth, - knowing that it meant nothing, without leading the weak astray, with the intent of not offending the Jews - so as to win as many as possible. Peter was doing this out of **fear**, he **was** leading the weak astray, he **was** undermining Paul's ministry to the Jews and Gentiles, and this - while not in Jerusalem where great pains had to be taken to not upset the Jews. Of course, Paul *opposed this* and rightly so.

Going back to our specific topic, under the New Covenant, you can grow your hair or shave your head it means nothing – it has no value - it is irrelevant in terms of salvation. The law of Moses has been removed and replaced with the **law of Christ**.

Hebrews 8:13 *In speaking of a "new" covenant, he has made the first one obsolete...*

As a general principle, it was Paul's instruction for men to have short hair and women to have long, which is the natural order of things. He gave this instruction at Corinth, the very place where he took the vow - once again showing his willingness to be *all things to all men* and keep a custom he knows

is irrelevant, in order to win Jews.

1Cor 11.14-5 *Does not nature itself teach you that **if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him**, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?*

Do you **still** think Paul clung to his old Jewish customs, because he valued them, or thought them important for salvation? I once had a Messianic Jew try to tell me, the Church council was starting the Gentiles off with Noahide laws and were leading them toward complete submission to Mosaic law.

Proverbs 18:19 *A brother **offended** is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.*

As to **not offend** you (those who want to follow Yeshua - by keeping the law of Moshe), I will let Paul speak for himself, about his transformation from Pharisee to Christian apostle to the Gentiles (and Jews).

Philippians 3: 2-9 *Beware of the **evil workers** (strong language against Judaizers)! Beware of the **mutilators** (circumcision of the flesh – law). For it is **we** (Christians – or Messianic Jews who follow grace, not law) who are the **circumcision** - we who worship in the **Spirit** of God (hearts are circumcised) and find our joy in the Messiah Jesus. We have not placed any confidence in the flesh, although I could have confidence in the flesh. If anyone thinks he can place confidence in the flesh, I have more reason to think so. Having been circumcised on the eighth day, **I am of the nation of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews**. As far as the **law** is concerned, I **was** a **Pharisee**. As for my zeal, I **was** a **persecutor** of the church. As far as **righteousness in the law** (vows, Sabbaths, circumcision, Torah, etc.) is concerned, I **was blameless**. But whatever things **were** assets to me (ceremonies, rites, law keeping, etc.), these I **now** consider **a loss** for the sake of the Messiah. What is more, I **continue** to consider **all these things** as **a loss** for the sake of the what is far more valuable, knowing the Messiah Jesus, my Lord. It is because of him that I have experienced the loss of all those things. Indeed, I **consider them rubbish** in order to **gain the Messiah** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes **from the law** (Mosaic laws), but one that comes through the faithfulness of the Messiah, the righteousness that comes from God and that **depends on faith** (not law).*

So, here we have Paul **himself** saying that his Jewish heritage as a Pharisee and a keeper of the **law** was **rubbish** and he **denounced** those who clung to the **law** in the strongest possible terms. Paul was not trying to be unkind (or anti-Semitic) and neither are Christians who worship in Spirit and leave legalism behind. We know that **unless** you let go of the hand of Moses and take the hand of Jesus, then he has died for you in vain. You are still under the “curse of the law” and will miss the **promised inheritance** (promised through Abraham).

Something was missed by the Judaizers in Paul's day, which is still not understood by the legalists in our day – Christ doesn't make one new man out of the Jewish and Gentile believers by placing the Gentiles under Mosaic law. He **removes the Mosaic law** and puts the Jewish believers on the same footing as the Gentile believers – under the law of Christ.

The law of commandments contained in ordinances was written by the hand of Moses, kept in the side of the ark, contained the civil and ceremonial laws, as well as the Decalogue (10 commandments) which was written twice in it. Some try to do away with only the ceremonial and civil laws and keep the Decalogue, but 2 Corinthians 3:7 tells us the law written on stone is also perished, as do many other

verses which point to the annulment of the entire covenant and it's laws.

Ephesians 2:14-16 *For He Himself is our peace, who **has made both one**, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, **that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances**, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two*

There are some big lessons in Paul's haircut. Let's take them to heart. We must serve in the new way of the Spirit and follow the **law of Christ**, not Mosaic laws of the Old Covenant. We must have the righteousness that comes by faith.

Romans 8:1-2 *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death (Mosaic law).*

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