

Set Apart Holy

By Moshe Schwab

When Rabbi Shaul (Paul) says we are “set apart” or “separated” he is thinking of a people who have separated themselves to be holy. Yeshua (Jesus) said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, accompanied by all the angels, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from goats.” Matt. 25:31-32 CJB. The sheep are those who decide to live holy lives and the goats are the rebellious who do not choose to follow God.

The terms set apart and separated also were used for separating oneself from sinful despicable acts or separation of oneself from those that engage in sinful acts. It was a part of Jewish culture at the time of Yeshua; they understood what it meant to separate oneself. Kefa (Peter) goes with the Gentiles in Acts 10 only after God tells him to go. Kefa then must explain himself to the top leaders of Nazarene Judaism in Acts 11. A consensus is reached after some contention. Worthy Gentiles who decide to live holy and good lives can also believe on Yeshua and receive the Holy Spirit.

Later, we learn in Acts 15 that Gentiles must also learn and obey the Torah. This scripture in Acts 15 is about Gentiles learning the Torah: “Moshe has had in every city those who proclaim him, with his words being read in the synagogues every Shabbat.” Acts 15:21 CJB. Even though Gentiles were made part of Nazarene Judaism, the Gentiles were to obey the Torah. Being an observant believer depended on separating oneself and doing what is right and good.

Even in the Quran community at the time, they were expected to be separate. “The men of holiness who walk in perfection, it shall not be merged with that of the men of injustice who have not purified their life by separating themselves from iniquity and walking in the way of perfection.” From 4 Q 255-264.¹

To what degree are we to separate ourselves? Those that were sinning could not be part of the community unless they repented, see 1 Cor. 5. Those in the community could associate with those who did not believe. 1 Corinthians 5:10 CJB says, “I didn't mean the sexually immoral people outside your community, or the greedy, or the thieves or the idol-worshippers—for then you would have to leave the world altogether!” Most certainly those who were interested in learning about the community were welcome. When the great ancient Rabbi Hillel was asked by a Gentile if he could become part of the Jewish community he said to the man, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.”² In others words, yes he can be Jewish and he gave him something to start working on. Of course, the inquirer would then learn all the commandments and do them.

Shaul says we are not to team up with sinful people. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 it says: “Do not yoke yourselves together in a team with unbelievers. For how can righteousness and lawlessness be partners?” “Yoke” was a common term referring to keeping the Torah, God’s laws. Early believers would have understood Shaul (Paul) to be saying not to team up with people who don’t keep the Torah, God’s commandments. Shaul says, ‘How can those who do what is right (the righteous) be partners with the lawless (anomia – those not keeping the Torah; nomia is used in the Septuagint for the Torah)?’ Here again we see the idea of separation. Shaul uses very strong language in 2 Cor. 10:5-6: “We demolish arguments and every arrogance that raises itself up against the knowledge of God; we take every thought captive and make it obey the Messiah. And when you have become completely obedient, then we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience.”

¹ The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English (7th Edition) (Penguin Classics) (p. 110). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel_the_Elder

When Shaul talks about himself being separated he means that he has taken a position of holiness. “Set apart for the Good News of God.” Rom. 1:1 CJB. It would be easy to pass over the words “set apart,” but the words meant something specific in that culture. When he talks about us not being separated from the love of Messiah in Romans 8, we perhaps think of it in a physical sense; namely that we cannot be physically separated from Messiah. It should be more the idea that we are a holy people and therefore cannot be separated from Yeshua.

We should get this sense from Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” God is for us because of the mutual separation of us by God and our decision to be a separate holy people. The context of Romans 8 should be understood in this way. Some people mistakenly say that the term being separate had to do with not being around Gentiles; it has more to do with staying pure spiritually. Others say that being separate means that we have eternal security; they mean that once we believe in Yeshua we are permanently “saved.” Actually, it is more correct to say that we are secure in that we have decided to follow Yeshua and God’s commandments. It says in Isaiah 59:2, “It is your own crimes that separate you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you.” And in Isaiah 1:18-19 it says, “‘Come now,’” says ADONAI (God), ‘let’s talk this over together. Even if your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow; even if they are red as crimson, they will be like wool. If you are willing and obedient...’”

The reason for our closeness to God is because we follow God. This makes perfect sense, so don’t be confused by theology that doesn’t understand how the New Testament has its roots in the Old Testament. It says in Proverbs in the Old Testament, “Do not let grace and truth leave you— bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and esteem in the sight of God and of people. Trust in ADONAI with all your heart; do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him; then he will level your paths.” Prov. 3:3-6 CJB. We are to be a holy people that follow God’s commandments. Shaul says in 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, “Go out from their midst; separate yourselves; don’t even touch what is unclean. Then I myself will receive you. In fact, I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters.” 2 Cor. 6:17-18.³

³ When Shaul speaks, he speaks as a Rabbi would and has scriptures from the Old Testament in mind. Isa. 52:11 CJB says, “Leave! Leave! Get out of there! Don’t touch anything unclean!”