

STANDING WHEN MANY ARE RETIRING (2)

Those who launch their criticism against the Messianic and Torah obedient lifestyle and belief, often do so with a kind of vigour and conviction that reveals an attitude of disgust against anyone who dares to challenge the traditional, "christian" way of interpreting Scriptures. As a rule, these people see it as their "christian duty" to warn others against this "movement" - sometimes branded as "a cult"; "dangerous heresy"; "Judaizers"; "the worst trap possible"; "a movement that shipwrecks the faith of many"; "an insult to the work of Christ"; and a great number of other not-so-friendly designations. While these labels are not flattering at all, and may even cause deep hurt and second thoughts in the minds of many who have discreetly, but bravely, chosen the Messianic route, it is most essential that those who are on the receiving end of this criticism understand what they are doing and know where they are going! Let us once again look into some of these criticisms and measure them up against the clarity of Scriptures.

The statements in the following section are typical examples of these criticisms and are based largely upon the contents of an article (published on the internet) entitled "The Return of the Judaizers", by Andrew Strom, moderator of the "Prophetic Revival School", based in the United Kingdom. In the article Strom expresses his concern about people referring to themselves as Torah-observant who are (in his view) losing the simplicity of faith by adding things to it in a way that disregards what Messiah has done for us.

In Shaul's (Paul's) letters (like Galatians) we are warned against replacing the new walk of the Spirit with obeying the letter of the Old Testament .

Answer: Although Scriptures are clear that we should not become so entangled with the letter of the law that we fail to grasp the deeper meaning of the same law, it never tries to picture obedience to the "Old Testament" as the opposite of walking in the Spirit. The prophecies of the "Old Testament" stated clearly and simply that there would come a time when Yahweh would pour out his Spirit in the hearts of believers and that this very "event" would cause them to (once again) obey his words and follow his commandments (YermeYahu / Jeremiah 31:33; Yechezkel / Ezekiel 36:25-27). This kind of lifestyle was most evidently exemplified by Y'shua the Messiah whom we confess to be the Leader and Perfecter of our belief (Ivrim / Hebrews 12:2) and none of his disciples or apostles tried to paint a picture of the walk of faith contrary to this.

We should put our faith in Messiah, and in Him alone, not in Messiah PLUS the keeping of the law. Answer: While an argument like this SOUNDS very convincing and straightforward, it is based upon a complete misconception and does not reflect the true message of Scriptures. We cannot exclude "the keeping of the law" from "faith in the Messiah", simply because there is no doubt that He kept the law perfectly (Yahuchanan / John 8:46; Ivrim / Hebrews 7:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21)! Faith in the Messiah is not only pictured as BELIEVING what He said, but also (and most importantly) LIVING the way He lived. That is what makes us true followers of the Messiah and it proves that calling ourselves "his disciples" is more than just an impressive, but empty cliché.

In Acts 15 it was determined that the Gentile believers in the Messiah were not required to be (or to become) Torah observant.

Answer: This is not entirely true. In the New Covenant Scriptures the message is echoed repeatedly that in Messiah believers from different backgrounds are joined together in one body as a unity. Given the wide variety of people who came to belief in the Messiah, this may not have been achieved without difficulty. That is why the leaders in Acts 15 decided to formulate a "new" basic requirement with regards to Gentile believers who had absolutely no former exposure to the Torah (which was still regarded as "the perfect Torah of freedom" - Yaacov / James 1:25 - and as set-apart, good and a delight for those who wish to please Yahweh - Romans 7:12 and 22). This was clearly an interim arrangement, as these new Gentile believers would soon learn to love and fully accept Torah because it is "being read in the congregations every Shabbat" (Acts 15:21).

In Colossians 2 we are told that the Old Testament requirements, a passing shadow of the true requirements of faith, were "nailed to the cross with Jesus".

Answer: Another inaccurate statement that forces two or three different issues into one argument to give more weight to a view that does not fully reflect the truth. Although Shaul calls the Shabbat and the feasts and the new moons a shadow of the things to come (notice: not a shadow of things that had already taken place), he never says that this shadow is bad or not needed or has ceased to exist. In addition to this, what was nailed to the stake, was most definitely NOT the Old Testament requirements. It was the (implied) certificate of debt, caused by uncircumcision of the flesh and disobedience to the Torah, a "document" with ordinances and stipulations ("dogmas") that posed a real threat, that was nailed to the stake. This fact (characterised by Yahweh's forgiveness, through his Son, Y'shua) has opened the door for people to be restored in their relationship and obedience to Yahweh.

In Romans 14 we are told that observing the Shabbat is only for those with a weak conscience and this does not make one more righteous than those who choose not to observe the Shabbat.

Answer: A closer examination reveals that Romans 14 does not mention the Shabbat at all. The "days" in this chapter are most probably days of fasting and the argument here reflects the well known dispute in the first century between different religious groups about the question: Which days of the week are the proper days for fasting? Shaul takes the view that in this matter there is no "right" and "wrong" (because there is no command in Scriptures to this effect) and that each one should follow his own conviction. Nowhere in Scriptures do we find the slightest indication that it was up to the individual believer to decide (a) whether he or she chooses to observe the Shabbat, and (b) on which day of the week he or she chooses to observe the Shabbat. The apostles never gave instructions that contradicted Scriptures, as it was known and taught in all the congregations on a regular basis. They only came up with new guidelines when a new and unique situation arose for which no clear indicators could be found in Scriptures.

Galatians 4 tells us that people who choose to observe the Shabbat and celebrate the Scriptural feasts are neglecting and insulting the work of the Messiah.

Answer: In the light of the fact that both the Messiah and his followers observed the Shabbat and celebrated the feasts, this is extremely difficult to believe! It remains a mystery why people tries to discredit the Shabbat and the Scriptural feasts (even to the point of twisting certain verses to support their arguments) while these days and what they stand for, reveal so much about the Messiah and, for that matter, the essence of what Scriptures are all about. The "days and months and seasons and years" of Galatians 4 are part of what Shaul calls "the weak and poor elementary matters" to which many in Galatia had been "enslaved before". Because we know (a) that no part of Scriptures is ever referred to in such a way, and (b) (the majority of?) the congregation in Galatia consisted of believers from a Gentile background, it is quite certain that the "days and months and seasons and years" are to be understood as part of the customs and practices of the Gentiles - heathen traditions that had subtly crept into the assemblies of the believers and had started to cause havoc and confusion.

Let us trust Yahweh to fill our minds with a spirit of discernment, so that we may be able to clearly distinguish between his eternal principles of righteousness and man's efforts to come up with a popular, alternative product.