

TRUE FOLLOWERS OF THE MESSIAH (2)

We are trying to establish what it means, Scripturally speaking, to be followers of the Messiah. If everyone who claims to be a follower of the Messiah, can make sure that he or she is not merely a follower of other so-called "followers", but truly a follower of the Messiah, then we should come much closer to the ideal of being united in his Name and in complete agreement with regards to the great number of petty differences that characterise the Messianic world today. When looking into these differences, and the way they are handled most of the times, it becomes clear that what had happened in the Christian world over several centuries, is slowly but surely happening all over again within the environment of Messianic believers. Certain Scriptures are subtly twisted; certain truths and half-truths are blown up to such an extent that other (more important) truths are neglected and certain basics (like simply following the Messiah) are tragically forgotten.

There is a simple test that will prove that this statement is not too far-fetched: Take ten different Messianic groups that you know of and try to establish why each one of these groups came into existence (or why certain of these groups separated themselves from other groups). Chances are that eight or nine out of each ten groups came into existence over issues or doctrines or differences, that never played any big role in the ministry and core message of the Messiah, neither that of his immediate followers (like Shaul and the other apostles). There is even a great chance that some of these groups came into existence over exactly the same issues that both Y'shua and the early apostles warned against! Groups that concentrate so firmly on keeping the outward, visible and impressive aspects of Torah that they neglect the essence of love, righteousness and kindness, like the Pharisees of Y'shua's day; or groups that insist that gentile believers be made into full blast Jews, like what happened in Galatia and some of the other congregations in the time of the apostle Shaul. While it is true that both the Messiah and the early apostles concentrated on matters that, in those times, "begged" to be addressed, and for this very reason, may not have addressed other issues that were obvious (and of equal importance), this habit of following the example of the Messiah as closely as possible, should be a priority among all those who wish to remain faithful to Scriptures. Let us look at one of the key passages in this regard (notice the very last words: "... not according to Messiah")

Col 2:6-8 Therefore, as you accepted Messiah Y'shua the Master, walk in Him, having been rooted and built up in Him, and established in the belief, as you were taught, overflowing in it with thanksgiving. See to it that no one makes a prey of you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary matters of the world, and not according to Messiah.

Following the Messiah, means "walking in Him". The same word "walk" (Gr. "peripateo") is used in the same letter, just a couple of verses earlier, in chapter 1:10 ("walk worthily of the Master, pleasing all [meaning: "in all things, looking to please Yahweh"], bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of Elohim"). There is no better description of what it means to walk in Messiah and these three qualities should be pursued by all who claim to be Messianic believers.

Following Messiah means to discontinue walking like the sons of disobedience, but, at the same time, it also means: still very much remaining what you are. The same word ("walk" / "peripateo") is also used a couple of verses later, in chapter 3:6-11: "the wrath of Elohim is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked when you lived in them. But now, also put off all these: displeasure, wrath, evil, blasphemy, filthy talk from your mouth. Do not lie to each other, since you have put off the old man with his practices, and have put on the new one who is renewed in knowledge according to the likeness of Him who created him, where there is not Greek and Yehudite, circumcised and uncircumcised, foreigner, Scythian, slave, free, but Messiah is all, and in all."

Following Messiah means being rooted in Him. According to Ephesians 3:17 ("that the Messiah might dwell in your hearts through belief - having become rooted and grounded in love") this means being rooted and grounded in love, that is, driven and motivated by Y'shua's love, to such an extent that his actions and attitudes transpire in our way of living, talking and thinking.

Following Messiah means being built up in Messiah. According to Acts 20:32 this can only happen through the word of Yahweh's favour ("I commit you to Elohim and to the word of His favour, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those having been set apart"); according to Ephesians 2:20 this means having the same foundation as the prophets and the apostles ("having been built upon the foundation of the emissaries and prophets, Y'shua Messiah Himself being chief corner-stone").

Following Messiah means being established in the belief, that is: stable, unmoveable, unshakeable and strong. According to 1 Corinthians 1:6-8 this means holding fast onto the testimony of Y'shua, knowing that this is what will enable us to endure until the end and eventually appear before Messiah, unblemished and unreprouvable ("the witness of Messiah was confirmed (or: established) in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Master Y'shua Messiah, who shall also confirm (or: establish) you to the end, unreprouvable in the day of our Master Y'shua Messiah").

Following Messiah means not being deceived by the tradition of men. The word "tradition" ("paradosis") quite literally means that which was handed or carried or given over or that which was perpetuated from generation from generation in the form of doctrines, teachings, customs, and belief systems. To claim that one is a follower of Messiah and at the same time being entangled by the complications of a religious system, does not make sense, irrespective of whether this system is by nature Jewish, Christian or anything else. We should remember that not all traditions are wrong and that Shaul advised the believers in Thessalonica that they should stand fast and hold the traditions which they were taught, whether by word or by our letter (2 Thes 2:15).

Following Messiah means not being deceived by the elementary matters of the world. The elementary matters of the world does not refer to the any part of the Torah, as some are trying to prove. Nowhere in Scriptures is Torah referred to as "the (weak and) elementary matters of the world". The Greek word ("stoicheia") refers to a line or a series or an orderly arrangement, and the way the Greek philosophers liked to arrange everything - from stars and numbers and deities to events and scientific principles - in an orderly and understandable and manageable format. It is very much the same as the tendency today to reformulate, reconstruct and give a manmade structure and flavour to the plain contents of Scriptures. The Messiah would never have done such a thing, neither should we. In short: Following Messiah means not following the world.