

Are Jews Who Believe in Jesus Still Jews?

If I've heard it once, I've heard it a thousand times, from both Jews and Christians: "If you believe in Jesus, you're no longer Jewish. You were Jewish. You're not Jewish anymore."

Actually, I am Jewish and I do believe in Jesus.

You can call me a Messianic Jew.

You can call me a Jewish Christian.

I am, most certainly, both.

Christians will often quote Paul's famous words from Galatians 3:28 to buttress their point. There Paul wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, and there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Using this same logic, a man who believes in Jesus is no longer a man, and a woman who believes in Jesus is no longer a woman. Or a slave who believes in Jesus is no longer a slave and a free person who believes in Jesus is no longer a free person.

In practice, that would mean no men's meetings or women's meetings in our churches. Or no men's or ladies' rooms in our church buildings. (You get the idea.)

It would also mean, going back to the days of Paul, that the moment a slave became a Christian, he could inform his master that he was no longer a slave and would be leaving post haste.

This wrong reading of Galatians 3:28 would also bring into question why Paul actually gave specific directives to men and to women, to husbands and to wives, to slaves and to masters.

Why do this if these distinctions no longer existed?

Of course there are still Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free.

Paul's point was that, in Jesus, there is no caste system and no class system, no one higher and no lower. Every believer is equally a child of God, equally forgiven and loved by the Father, equally a member of Christ's body, equally a priest to God, equally a branch of the vine.

That's the incredible, liberating power of the gospel, and Paul's words were truly revolutionary when written. They are revolutionary to this day.

It was Paul who also wrote Romans 10:12-13: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is generous toward all who call upon Him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

Yet Paul could refer to his own lineage (he was still an Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; see 2 Cor. 11:22, Philippians 3:5; although, to be sure, he put no confidence in the flesh). And it was James (Jacob) who shared with Paul that there were tens of thousands of fellow Jews who now followed Jesus as Messiah (Acts 21:20). James did not call them former Jews.

So, just as I am a male follower of Jesus, I am also a Jewish follower of Jesus. And the reason I make that part of my statement of faith is because of the widespread, historic misconception that "Jews don't believe in Jesus" or, "Jesus is not for Jews."

As for the claim from my own Jewish people that I was Jewish but no longer am, what they really mean to say is, "You're no longer practicing Judaism."

That, of course, is true, and I never deny that in the least.

I am not a traditional Jew, and I do not practice traditional Judaism (although I do appreciate many of our traditions).

But there are millions of nominal Jews (including a healthy percentage of atheistic Jews), yet very few question whether they're still Jewish. There are even Jewish Buddhist (called Jubus) and Jewish cult members, and they are still recognized as Jews.

Why, then, are they still Jewish, yet I am not Jewish—despite my deep connection to my people? Despite being married to a Jewish woman (who also believes in Jesus). Despite learning Hebrew after coming to faith. Despite believing in Jesus (Yeshua) as the Jewish Messiah. Despite honoring every word of the Tanakh (what Christians call the Old Testament).

To be sure, most rabbis I have interacted with over the decades recognize me as a Jew but believe I have gone astray.

But others would say, “You’re no longer Jewish because you changed religions.”

That, however, would mean that nominal Jews and atheistic Jews were no longer Jewish because they were not following traditional Judaism.

More importantly, that would deny the fact that being Jewish is both religious (practicing Judaism) and ethnic (born of a Jewish parent or parents).

Even more importantly, those who claim I’m no longer Jewish must forget that Jesus was born King of the Jews and died King of the Jews. That all of His first followers were Jews. That most (if not all) of the New Testament books were written by Jews. And that the gates of the New Jerusalem will carry the names of the 12 tribes of Israel while its foundations will carry the name of the 12 (Jewish!) apostles.

You had better believe that you can be Jewish and follow

Jesus.

In fact, the majority of us who identify as Messianic Jews will tell you that following Jesus has made us even more Jewish.

The truth is that I am saved by grace, forgiven through the cross, redeemed by the love of God—and still Jewish. And there are hundreds of thousands of others just like me.

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