

I Am Not Self-righteous or Legalistic

I have been a Messianic Jew for more than 40 years. When people find out that I am, after they get past the whole “What, you’re a Jew who believes in Yeshua (Jesus)?” thing, I am often asked how I walk out my life as a Jew. I say that I am asked when, in truth, it is more often a challenge than a question.

I usually hear something like, “Aren’t you so happy that Yeshua set you free from the Law?” When I respond that as a Jewish believer in Yeshua I believe the Law has become more important to my life, not less important, the next statement is usually something like, “Wait a minute—you don’t believe that Yeshua did away with the Law?” to which I reply, “Read what Yeshua said in Matthew 5:17-18 (TLV):”

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass.”

It is my assumption that everyone who is reading this is still standing (or sitting) upon the earth so according to Yeshua, the Torah and prophets have not been abolished.

I quoted the verse above from the TLV Bible but the other accurate translations all say basically the same thing, using slightly different English words. Those who don’t ask me the question about Yeshua doing away with the Law usually will wrongly assume that I am a legalist who believes in some form of works-based salvation.

This could not be further from the truth. I am a Messianic Jew because I absolutely, positively, without exception believe in

the atonement that came only through the substitutionary sacrifice of Yeshua. I completely agree with verses such as Ephesians 2:8-9:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves—it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one may boast.”

and Titus 3:5:

“not by deeds of righteousness which we had done ourselves, but because of His mercy— He saved us through the mikveh of rebirth and renewing of the Ruach ha-Kodesh.”

I also fully believe in what we read in Romans 3:23-26:

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are set right as a gift of His grace, through the redemption that is in Messiah Yeshua. God set forth Yeshua as an atonement, through faith in His blood, to show His righteousness in passing over sins already committed. Through God’s forbearance, He demonstrates His righteousness at the present time—that He Himself is just and also the justifier of the one who puts his trust in Yeshua.”

There should never, ever be a question in the mind of a believer in Yeshua that our righteousness comes through what He did and not through anything that we can do.

However, once we have been made righteous by the grace of G-D, and the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Yeshua, we become a new creation in Messiah. As new creations, we begin to walk in the Spirit and demonstrate the Fruit of the Spirit. The same Paul that wrote Galatians 3:11,

“It is clear that no one is set right before God by Torah, for ‘the righteous shall live by emunah,’”

also wrote Galatians 5:16-21:

“But I say, walk by the Ruach, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Ruach, but the Ruach sets its desire against the flesh—for these are in opposition to one another, so that you cannot do what you want. But if you are led by the Ruach, you are not under law. Now the deeds of the flesh are clear: sexual immorality, impurity, indecency, idolatry, witchcraft, hostility, strife, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, just as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit God’s kingdom.”

and Romans 3:31:

“Do we then nullify the Torah through faithfulness? May it never be! On the contrary, we uphold the Torah.”

If you take the time to look at the things listed in Galatians 5:19-21, you will notice that each one of these things are listed as sins in the Torah and Israel was commanded to refrain from each and every one of them.

You see, my desire to walk according to the Torah as much as humanly possible today has nothing to do with earning or achieving righteousness. My righteousness only comes as Romans 3:26 says, “Through God’s forbearance, He demonstrates His righteousness at the present time—that He Himself is just and also the justifier of the one who puts his trust in Yeshua.”

However, because G-D has made me righteous, He has given me a holy calling, as we find in 2 Timothy 1:9:

“He has saved us and called us with a holy calling— not because of our deeds but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Messiah Yeshua before time began.”

Because G-D has made me righteous, He has made it possible for me to be holy. The word holy means separate or different.

Distinct from those who have not been made righteous. In other words, I became righteous when I was made a new creation in Yeshua. I was reborn of the Ruach, which gave me the power to be a witness.

Acts 1:8:

“But you will receive power when the Ruach ha-Kodesh has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and through all Judah, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

That way, I can stand in agreement with Jacob (James) 2:14-18:

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can such faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in shalom, keep warm and well fed,’ but you do not give them what the body needs, what good is that? So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works and I will show you faith by my works.

and what Paul wrote to the body of believers in Ephesians 5:1-4:

“Therefore be imitators of God, as dearly loved children; and walk in love, just as Messiah also loved us and gave Himself up for us as an offering and sacrifice to God for a fragrant aroma. But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed—don’t even let these be mentioned among you, as is proper for kedoshim. Obscene, coarse, and stupid talk are also out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Know for certain that no immoral, indecent, or greedy person—who is really an idol worshipper at heart—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Messiah and God.”

So, as a Messianic Jew, I don’t keep the commandments in order to be righteous. I keep them because my G-D is righteous and I

am striving to be part of a holy people. I don't eat kosher or keep Shabbat or keep the Holy Days or abstain from sexual immorality or idolatry in order to be righteous. I keep them because my G-D is righteous and I am trying to walk in holiness, part of the body of believers that 1 Peter 2:9 speaks about:

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." {eoa}

Rabbi Eric Tokajer has served the community of Brit Ahm Messianic Synagogue in Pensacola, Florida since 2006. In addition to serving at Brit Ahm, he also helped to establish six other Messianic synagogues along the United States, Gulf Coast. He is also a sought-after speaker for both national and international conferences and events, and has authored 12 books. In addition to his duties as a rabbi, he also serves on the board of several Messianic ministries and as the theology team facilitator for the Tree of Life Version Bible.

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.