

Messianic Rabbi: The Difference Between Holiness and Righteousness

A few years ago, I was invited to go fishing with one of my friends. As we drove together to the lake, my friend told me his wife had bought him a new lure the day before. He held up the package and as he did he said with a smile, "Isn't it pretty?"

Now, he was not saying those words in the "Isn't it pretty" of a sportsman looking at a new fishing pole, rifle or boat. He was saying it because it was one of the most fru fru fishing lures he had ever seen.

As the day went on, we fished all over the lake while having a great conversation (something fishermen say takes place when they are not catching any fish). As we watched the sun cross mid-afternoon on its route to setting, we decided we'd had enough conversation and started heading toward the boat ramp. As we slowly motored on our way, I watched as my friend exchanged the bait we had been using all day for the lure his wife had purchased for him. When I asked him about this, he said, "She's gonna ask if I used it. She bought it for me; I've got to at least honor her by using it once."

So we stopped the boat as he cast the new lure out into the water. Within seconds, for the first time all day, he got a hit on his line. After a short fight, he pulled a beautiful bass out of the water. I then spent the next hour watching him cast that lure into the water over and over, catching one bass after another.

On the way home, our conversation was mostly about the amount of fish he caught on that fru fru lure and how much more we might have caught that day if he had tied that lure on his

line from the outset of the day.

You may be wondering what this fish story has to do with the difference between holiness and righteousness.

Many of us live our lives trying to be righteous, like my friend that day. He knew it was the righteous thing to do to use the lure his wife bought for him, but he only did it because he knew it was the righteous thing to do, whereas holiness is simply doing what G-D would have done in the same situation.

Let me explain further. If somehow my friend's wife had watched as we fished all day just waiting for her husband to use the special lure she had bought for him, only to watch him tie it to his line while saying "She's gonna ask," would she have considered his actions righteous, loving, honoring? No, she would not. But imagine how she would have felt had she been able to watch him arrive at the lake and share excitedly about the lure his wife had bought for him and then watched him tie the lure onto his line before the very first cast.

In other words, his actions should have been motivated by his love for his wife and not because "she was gonna ask." That is the difference between holiness and righteousness. Holiness isn't doing the right thing because it is righteous. Holiness is being so affected by love that you don't even consider doing the wrong things. G-D commanded His people to be holy as He is holy in Leviticus 19:1-2 (TLV):

"*ADONAI* spoke to Moses saying: 'Speak to all the congregation of *Bnei-Yisrael* and tell them: You shall be *kedoshim*, for I, *ADONAI* your God, am holy.'"

Many people believe that this is an impossible task for humans to achieve. However, it really isn't impossible at all. But it does require our truly allowing G-D to provide a new heart and new spirit, as we read in Ezekiel 36:26 (TLV):

“Moreover I will give you a new heart. I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

With this new heart comes the kind of love for G-D that results in holiness. It is this holiness that makes it possible for us to obey the commandments to love G-D and love our neighbors. Holiness goes beyond a desire to be seen as righteous. This is what Yeshua was teaching about in Matthew 23:2-3 (TLV) when He spoke of the Torah scholars and Pharisees, saying:

“The *Torah* scholars and Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. So whatever they tell you, do and observe. But don’t do what they do; for what they say, they do not do.”

Notice that Yeshua didn’t speak against what they were teaching; He only spoke against what they were doing. Going further, He didn’t speak against what they were doing because what they were doing was wrong. No, Yeshua spoke against what they were doing because of their motivation. Yeshua’s words were, “All their works they do to be noticed by men” (Matt. 23:5, TLV).

You see, we can do righteous works without being holy. But if you are holy, you will do righteous works. {eoa}

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