

Messianic Rabbi: The Problem with Paul

Read Time: 3 Minutes 36 Seconds

I cannot tell you the number of conversations that I have participated in, or the number of sermons or Bible studies I have heard, where someone made the statement, “The problem with Paul is...” and then the person made a definitive statement of what they thought Paul said, did or taught wrong.

The bottom line is that when Christianity adjudicated the divorce proceedings between Law and grace, Paul was like the third wheel best friend of the couple who was supposed to choose who he was going to stay friends with: the ex husband or the ex wife.

However, Paul chose to stay friends with both, and his choice has caused a huge problem among Bible believers ever since. Paul’s choice to both be pro-Law and pro-grace has been a fly in the ointment of many “New Testament” scholars.

Because Paul never made the decision to choose between the ex-husband (Law) or the ex-wife (grace), pastors and teachers for 2,000 years have been making that choice for Paul and then justifying their choice by manipulating the writings of Paul to justify their position.

For example, one teacher might use Ephesians 2:8-9 to establish that Paul chose grace over Law:

“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.”

While another teacher might quote Romans 3:31 to prove that Paul continued to follow Torah and teach others to do so:

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

The truth, however, is that the reason Paul never chose sides in the divorce between Law and grace is because Paul understood that the New Testament was never intended to be the divorce decree of Law and grace. Paul knew that Law and grace have an everlasting relationship and, in fact, are inseparable. Paul didn't choose a side in the divorce because the divorce only took place in the minds and hearts of “scholars” who, for some reason, couldn't comprehend the absolute and complete compatibility of Law and grace.

Paul understood that it was completely compatible to believe in the absolute and complete redemptive work of grace, while at the same time, Paul made the arduous and dangerous journeys to Jerusalem to keep the commanded Feast of the Lord. Paul believed there was complete harmony between trusting in the sacrificial offering of Yeshua for his redemption and continuing to make sacrifices in the Temple. Paul understood fully that a person's eternal relationship with G-D wasn't based upon circumcision of the flesh, yet he also understood the need to circumcise Timothy.

For nearly 2,000 years, believers in Messiah have been operating under the false assumption that the glass of faith either has to be half empty or half full, when the truth that Paul understood was that it is a faulty premise to believe that we must make a choice between half empty and half full. Paul understood that the glass of our faith is not either half full or half empty, rather our glass is both half full and half empty. Paul understood that the teachings of the Bible were never intended to cause us to make a choice between Law and grace; G-D's Word emphatically teaches us to follow the example of Paul and embrace both Law and grace enthusiastically.

It is with this in mind that Paul wrote these words in Titus

2:11-12:

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, training us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live in a manner that is self-controlled and righteous and godly in the present age.”

Notice that while Paul says that grace appeared and brought salvation to all men, he also says that grace will train us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live in a manner that is self-controlled, righteous and godly. In other words, true belief in grace brings with it an obedience to Law.

So, it seems many people believe that there is a problem with Paul. However, the greatest problem with Paul doesn't have anything to do with Paul or what Paul wrote. The problem is the false belief that Paul's writings instituted a divorce or division between Law and grace. The truth is that Paul's writings, along with the rest of the Bible, actually establish that the relationship between Law and grace is inseparable.

So, it may be that if we see a problem with Paul, then the problem is actually us.

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Eric Tokajer is the author of “Overcoming Fearlessness,” “What If Everything You Were Taught About the Ten Commandments Was Wrong?,” “With Me in Paradise,” “Transient Singularity,” “OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry,” “#ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer,” “Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians” and “Galatians in Context.”