

Messianic Christianity

Introduction

Some of the Messianic teachers say that because the Christian faith has been polluted by heathen cultures like Hellenism (Greek culture), true worship must be restored by returning to its Hebrew roots. In order to do this certain of Old Testament laws and practices have to be re-introduced. In this way the true character of the Christian faith will be restored. This emphasis has resulted that their way of worship has become more in line with rabbinic forms of religion than with the New Testament teaching. Many see their Jewishness as more important than their identity as Christians. They seem to ignore the fact that the focal point of a Christian should be the teachings of the New Testament and not the cultural background of rabbinic Judaism.

Rebuilding the dividing wall

“For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man...” (Eph. 2:14-15).

“There is neither Jew nor Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

According to the New Testament, even a Jewish Christian should find his new spiritual identity, not in Old Testament culture, but in Christ Jesus. Who was more Jew than Paul who said that he was:

“..circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel...a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee...But whatever things were gain to me, those things I counted as loss for the sake of Christ?” (Phil. 3:4-7).

It is fundamentally unscriptural to cause division in the body of Christ by introducing Jewish legalism (“Torah living”) in the form of Old Testament laws and practices. Those who are doing this and who call themselves Christians, are busy counteracting the message of Jesus and the apostles and are making disciples of men, rather than disciples of Jesus.

Must Christians keep the Sabbath?

“Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day – things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Col. 2:16-17).

“One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5).

Paul makes it very clear that each Christian has the liberty to decide for himself whether he wants to keep a certain day. What we must remember though, is the context of his discussion. In the fourteenth chapter of his letter to Christians in Rome, he is admonishing those believers who are strong in the faith not to look down on those who are still weak in their beliefs.

*“Now accept **the one who is weak in the faith**...One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only..” (Rom.14:1-3, my emphasis).*

This chapter cannot be used to justify weakness in the understanding of New Testament doctrines, because in various other places in Scripture, we as believers are encouraged to come to spiritual maturity so that

“we are no longer children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14, Heb. 5:12, 6:1, 1 Tim. 4:16).

The main issue in this chapter is not a discussion of the right doctrine concerning legalism and holy days, but having the right attitude towards those who are still growing in their understanding of the faith. Surely, the freedom we have concerning the legalistic requirements of the Law, cannot forever be restricted by the immaturity of other believers? The goal is that we all grow up in our knowledge and understanding of New Testament doctrine so that we can fully enjoy our inheritance in Christ. Paul makes this very clear when he says that believers of longstanding ought to be teachers and not “*infants*” who need to be taught the elementary principles of the faith over and over again (**Heb. 5:12**). It is tragic to see how Christians who have been believers for many years and who should know better, are still being swayed by the false doctrines of dubious ministries.

What about the “seventh day” of Gen. 2:2-3?

No case can be made for the observance of a religious sabbath by quoting Genesis 2:2-3. We do not read that any such command was given to Adam and Eve. What must also be considered is the fact that Adam and Eve were only created on the sixth day and therefore needed no rest, because at that stage they did not have to work to earn a living yet. Therefore the “rest” mentioned here, could not have been applicable to them. The Bible tells us that it was God who rested from what He had done. How to determine the “seventh” day on which God rested on any calendar, is difficult to say. According to **Exodus 12:2** the Jewish religious calendar only started on the day on which Israel moved out of Egypt.

The first time in Scripture that we read about a sabbath being instituted, is in **Exodus 16:23-29**.

Israel and the Old Covenant

A thing that causes much confusion amongst Christians, is the fact that it is not understood that the Old Covenant was made between God and Israel only. It had nothing to do with the heathen nations of that time. The Law given to Moses at Sinai, was also applicable to Israel only. The seventh day Sabbath, given as part of the Law, was to be a sign to them of their covenant with God (**Ex.31**). Just like Jesus fulfilled all the other Old Testament types and pictures that symbolically pointed to Himself, He also became the “Sabbath” of the New Testament. He that now believes in Him *“has entered His rest”* and has *“rested from his own works”* (**Heb. 4:3,10**). The New Testament believer rests on the finished work of Christ on the cross. He does not have to impress God by any of his own works, for he knows that

*“by **one** sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy”* (**Heb.10:14**, My emphasis).

When the first gentiles were converted to Christ during the first few years of Christianity, the Jewish believers were faced with a problem; which of the laws of Moses did the gentile believers have to obey? They had to call a meeting in Jerusalem where Paul, the apostles and the brethren had to make a decision to solve their problem. After the meeting, Sabbath keeping was definitely not one of the things prescribed that had to be obeyed (**Acts 15:1-29**). **It is unthinkable that the apostles would have neglected to instruct the gentile believers to keep the Sabbath if it had been commanded by God.** A Jewish believer may observe the Sabbath as part of his cultural inheritance, if he wishes to do so, but may not consider it to have any importance in terms of spiritual righteousness. To teach somebody that it is necessary to keep the Law, or any other ordinance of Judaism, is to trample on the blood of the New Testament and to insult the Spirit of grace! (**Heb. 10:20**).

“But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (**Heb. 7:6**).

Coming from a man like Paul, a Hebrew of the Hebrews and once an aggressive defender of the Law, means that it is worth taking note of what he is saying!

Did Constantine change the Sabbath to a Sunday?

Constantine changed nothing. Because it was the custom of Christians, from apostolic times, to usually meet on the first day of the week (**Acts. 20:7, 1 Cor.16:1-2**), Constantine proclaimed it as a day on which no business could be done. (His decree: *“On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be*

closed” (Constantine, March 7. Codex Justinianus lib. 3,tit.12, 3; trans. In Philip Schaff, History of the Christian church, Vol.3 p.380, note 1).

Many people make the mistake of referring to Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Sabbath. Sunday is not the Jewish Sabbath. The day just before the first day of the week, the seventh day, is the Sabbath of the Old Testament. Neither is the first day of the week a Christian Sabbath. Nowhere in Scripture is there any reference to the first day of the week being changed into a Sabbath for New Testament believers. It is only a day on which the church finds it convenient to meet. But that they can do on any other day of the week.

Conclusion

The Sabbath is part of the Old Covenant. For Christians the Old Covenant is replaced by the New Testament (**Heb. 8:13**). Because the Sabbath is part of the Old Covenant, it is therefore not applicable to Christians (**Col. 2:16**).

Why is it that, in spite of such clear teaching from the New Testament, some Christians still continue to submit themselves to certain aspects of Mosaic law and rabbinic ordinances? I think that it is because the New Testament, especially the teachings found in letters like those written to the Galatians and the Hebrews, are not properly studied. The danger of placing so much emphasis on external obedience to certain Judaistic laws, is that it ties in with the modern tendency to associate sensory experiences with spirituality (“falling in the spirit”, rituals, icons, labyrinths, prayer walking, high places, blowing of shofars, visualizing Jesus, etc.)

“These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Col. 2:23).

It would serve us well to keep in mind that it is written: *“...we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 2:23).*

Conclusion

“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? ...did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” “Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith’ ” (Gal. 3:1-11).

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