

More about me #1
02/13/08
by
David ben Shaul

The title may sound arrogant and self serving. Actually one of my main intentions for the blog was to try to connect to those out there. So I am going to periodically do exactly that via focusing on who I am.

In a recent conversation I was reintroduced to my past walk. It has been very encouraging to find others that have been through the very same thing as I have – literally from around the world. We are coming to the same conclusions and actually trying to do something about it.

In my early years, my mom used to tell me that it was important to find G-d not religion. She raised me to question religious institutions, their practices, doctrines, and leadership. Religion and all they claimed was subordinate to G-d and G-d was not defined by religion. That, “religion is the work of men not G-d” was her central emphasis.

She taught me that religions would separate people according to the institution they were associated with. Religion, in many cases, is a social system that has a membership pride associated with it. How often have we had the following conversation? “I am a such and such” or “I belong to such and such – please come and JOIN us.” This is building a wall immediately. It creates an “us and them” mentality.

Recently at work I was speaking to a coworker about some religious issues. He is Catholic and I am not. So to break the ice I looked at him square in the eye and shot off two questions to him. “Do you put your pants on one leg at a time?” “Do you sit on the can?” He started to laugh and realized I was attempting to let him know, as people we are the same and don’t need our guard up. In the end he appreciated my questions and as a result I earned a friendship. During our conversation I did let him know that that in terms of faith it is ok to not see eye to eye. However, I respect his position and he respects mine.

I work with many different types of people with many different religious affiliations. There are Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, Atheists, Jews, and non-affiliates. Yet, many of these people come to me to discuss faith issues. Even though I am more or less Orthodox Jewish, they seek me out – not each other. They enjoy that I can speak with them in a way that gives them respect and dignity yet at the

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same time walk away with a new understanding, a truth, and even questioning their faith. The key is not for us to question other people's faith but rather leave others questioning their faiths. Let it be their walk.

I was also taught to be observant of actions. Watch the practices of others. In fact I am a "people watcher." Do this sometime. It is amazing how much people say without saying it. Not to mention the contradictions between what is said and what is actually done. Do people practice what they preach? Do religions practice what they preach? Does the Bible support such actions? Often I find the actions and words are not inline with each other.

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More about me #2

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Learning about doctrines was the hardest lesson. Doctrines will typically go against a plain understanding of the Bible. Otherwise there is no need for doctrines. In my younger days, as a Christian, I wondered why there were so many sects of Christianity. I wondered why we could not be at peace with each other since we are all “Christians”. Then the light bulb went on. They were interpreting the Bible by their set of doctrines. These doctrines were creating a context for the Bible to be understood in. Each sect determined how they wanted it to be reinterpreted, and then created the doctrine to support that agenda.

So then I started to say, “Those Catholics are wrong. Those Pentecostals are nuts. Those conservatives are legalist.” I fell in the trap. I was just as guilty as they were! I was projecting my agenda/doctrine into the Bible.

Doctrines are used to “interpret” the Bible according to manmade agendas. They were in effect putting G-d and His Word in a doctrinal box (man controlled interpretations).

Leadership was very disheartening to me. As a deacon I discovered that most pastors and deacons that I have encountered are controlling, manipulating, and self-seeking. This may sound harsh. However, this is exactly what I found. I found men that were devout born again, believing, dispensational, evangelical, “loving”, dedicated men that would do anything for their god. The end justified the means was the basic thought. To be fair I did meet one exception. But only ONE!

These men that I served with (deacons and pastors) are in the business of perpetuating and selling a religion/philosophy/institution and many times this is done in ignorance. It doesn't matter if it is true or not. They are determined to continue their practices, doctrines – all under the guise of “for our god!” But in all fairness is that what most of us do?

My examples are from my experiences so I will bring up the frailties of the Church and the Messianics. However it is by no means limited to these. The reality is we are all guilty. The real question is, “are we willing to do something about it?” Are well willing to try to understand G-d on his terms?

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