

Apostate Christians and Righteousness

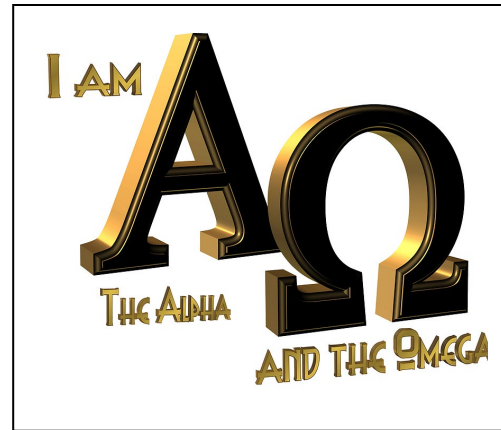
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I read a number of references to apostate Christians and to righteousness in the January edition. While I am in agreement I would also say that it depends where you stand as you identify these issues and how to address them.



Remember when you were 15 and 30 looked so old to you? And if you are more long lived, looking back at 30 from, say 70, makes 30 seem so young! (for that matter, even 70 looks young if you are 90!) How we identify concerns is affected by where we stand as we observe.

Anyone who is a serious student of His Word would agree that many institutional church bodies have departed from teaching the Word in its fullness. (“Apostate” means falling away from the standard. “Righteousness” is part of His standard.) I must also add that there is a difference between secular descriptions of what it means to be righteous, focusing on morality, justice, and so forth, while a Biblical definition acknowledges that God Himself is the standard for righteousness, and obedience to His ways is righteousness.

At what point did institutional Christian churches become apostate? When was righteousness no longer considered essential? (See “Free in the Spirit?” SAM article.) What do we need to do to restore righteousness in His sight?

In all honesty, I think that Jude had the primary key when he urged Believers to earnestly contend for the faith given once for the saints. (Jude 1:3) There is a timeline and narrative on our SAM website considering this:

How far back do you have to go to find that “once for all” given faith?

If we know where it began, we will know what the foundations and expectations were for those who follow this Mighty God.

I submit that we must begin at the beginning. Things do look different from there as opposed to looking back from the present. In Genesis 3, Yah already made known that He had a plan in place to deal with the sin that entered in in the garden. The whole of Scriptures is the same story told in different settings with different people but the same message. Revelation returns to the garden as the whole story concludes. The OT set the stage for us to recognize Messiah, and the NT confirms the eyewitness accounts of how Yeshua filled the prophecies. Reggie White used to say we need to rip out the blank page between the OT and NT because they are one! We in SAM do look at the continuity of His Word. They are all of one piece; inspired by the same Creator God Who said that He didn’t lie and He never changes. His Son, our Messiah Yeshua/Jesus said that He only taught what the Father taught. (If He HAD changed anything, he would have been a false prophet per Deuteronomy 18:20)

For I am the LORD. I do not change;

Malachi 3:6a NKJV

God is not a man that He should lie; nor a son of man that He should repent.

Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken and will He not make it good?

Numbers 23:19 NKJV

Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things

John 8:28 NKJV

For the evangelical Christian crowd in America, it is probably truthful to say that they look back to the Reformation to find the baseline for how to judge current status of apostasy or righteousness. Of course, those of the RCC consider it to be the mother of all churches, perhaps at least until recently when some have recognized a severe problem there! A year or two ago, I wrote a series in WCN about the “*sola Scriptura*” series...Scripture alone, Faith alone, Grace alone, etc...I identified that these profound documents were written in opposition to what they had seen happening in the church. Like Paul, whose messages could be so easily misunderstood, I suggested that these documents were expressing concern about specific points and needed to be understood in that context. Unfortunately, they took wing and appear to have become “doctrinal.” (Sometimes we have trouble correctly interpreting Paul’s words because we don’t know what questions he was responding to either.) Tozer noted that “the bird of truth has two wings.” I have long thought that was a very wise statement to remember the balance needed to comprehend deep issues.

The Reformers objected to stands taken by the RCC, yet they did not then look for all the foundational practices that should have been reinstated. For example, Dwight Moody was said to have understood that Sunday had not been instituted by God to replace the Seventh Day Sabbath. In fact, the RCC claimed that it had the authority to make this change, as the Vicar of Christ. Moody determined this was one point that he would concede in order to obtain the larger goals.(my paraphrase) So since seventh day Sabbath observance is Biblically considered to be a covenant relationship sign back not only to the Acts 2 church, but long before that, like a sign of betrothal between Believers and God, one could say the American Protestant church (and RCC) has been apostate for quite a long time already.

Many commandments have been recognized, accepted and acted upon by Believers thankfully, but there are still some that have NOT been accepted; most frequently, Shabbat observance, dietary guidelines and the observance of the Biblical Feasts of YHWH, which all tell Messiah’s story. RCC leadership made it powerfully clear that to observe any of these things meant anathema, “going back under the Law” and so forth. That understanding is so deeply embedded that even though I don’t recall anyone ever personally specifically saying this to me, it was a hurdle I had to study and deeply consider because it “felt” severely taboo. (I grew up Lutheran, so perhaps somehow Luther’s later years hostility toward the Jews was indirectly communicated to me?)

But let's take it another step. Many have taught that the "church" was born on Pentecost so they try to function only from that point forward. They often do not realize that the occasion was Shavuot, a well-established pilgrimage Feast Day of Believers. I have found many Christians have no idea what the 50 days has to do with anything. It has been taken out of its context. It does involve the Counting of the Omer and the 50 days, thus "Pentecost." All Israel met in Jerusalem annually by YHWH's calendar and call. Calling it by a Greek name seems to obscure the existing holy day on which the Holy Spirit descended en masse. Viewing it in continuity, we can see this was a part of the whole work of Messiah, fulfilling prophecy and preparing the way to go forward, now with the understanding of the Promised Messiah's identity and work in the empowerment of the Spirit.

Believers were only among the children of Israel/Judah for many years before the gentiles began to come in, especially under Paul's teaching. It was considered a sect of Judaism at the time, and those who received Messiah Yeshua were later mockingly called "Christians" at Antioch.' These believers received Messiah Yeshua/Jesus as both the Living and the Written Word.

And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law;

Acts 21:20 NKJV

If we were standing at this point and making observations about apostasy and righteousness, we could say that the "church" lost its way here and began moving away from the roots laid through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The desire to be separated from "the Christ killers" fed much church theology, though of course we know, it was all of our sin that required His atoning work on our behalf. And many realize that Caiaphas was a political appointee..... and that Messiah's life, death and resurrection was planned before the foundation of the world was laid; it wasn't a surprise or an accident! There is continuity from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane, not yet to mention the return to the Garden in the Lamb Light of Messiah!

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. Rev. 21:23 NKJV

Paul warned those in Rome and us today not to boast against the root because it bears us up. Forgetting this seems to me to be part of apostate behavior and a loss of the understanding that being righteous meant honoring the Law of our God...somehow thinking that Jesus' Law was different than His Father's, when HE SAID it was the same!

Do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. Romans 11:18 NKJV

Of course, this can be a ticklish subject because what we see as Rabbinic Judaism today is NOT the same set of beliefs and practices that our Messiah and first century believers maintained. In fact, there was a great deal of apostasy going on during the period of the Hasmonean Kings, right after the Maccabees, during the "400 years of silence" between the two Testaments. Yeshua spoke quite pointedly to them and chastised them often for their legalism and lack of true hearts of faith. He came to His own but they didn't receive Him....(John 1:11) You may recall that statement, but do you also recall this one?

Nevertheless, many of the leaders believed in Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue. For they loved praise from men more than praise from God. Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in Me does not believe in Me alone, but in the One who sent Me.... John 12:42-44 Berean Study Bible

We do need to determine where we take our stance regarding the true faith or the purity of how we practice it. It is important that our studies do not fall into eisegesis where we impose our cultural or time period interpretations on the Word but exegesis; where we focus on drawing out the full meaning in the original language and context: "the faith given once for all to the saints."

I don't think we should be surprised that the adversary and Babylon have worked so hard to bring confusion and chaos into the assemblies of His people. There is really too much of the world system in the religious system, and turning the heads of the unsuspecting sheep that their shepherds really aren't looking out for them as God has directed. Ezekiel made that pretty clear, and Messiah also spoke of His concern for people who are harried and helpless without a shepherd.

But our Abba did also say that He would restore shepherds after His own heart (Jeremiah 3:15) These shepherds will issue the call to repentance and *teshuvah*, speaking the fullness of His Word and His heart for His people. I have long thought that there would be a future version of "cities of refuge" as we face this onslaught against Believers. Brad Scott, one of our original teachers of Hebraic Christian focus of the Word, always said that if we understand the first 11 chapters of Genesis, we will know who all the characters are at the end of time near Messiah's return. I thought he was exaggerating but have found he was not.

Blessed are **those who wash their robes**, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. ESV

Blessed *are* **they that do his commandments**, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. KJV

Both of these are Rev. 22:14 "Washing of robes" equates with "doing His commandments."

Yeshua/Jesus IS our righteousness but we cannot flaunt His work on our behalf and live Unrighteously...Do we love the praises of men or of God? There is a cost to that choice and it will determine whether or not we have the right to the Tree of Life, entering in by the gates.