

9 Sivan, 5767 (May 19, 2007) *Grass Roots Spirituality: Listening to Your Conscience* J.M. Terrett
A Messianic Jewish Approach to Religious Revival, Renewal and Reality

Parasha Naso Elevate
 Torah: **Num. 4:21-7:89**
 Haftarah: **Judges 13:2-25**
 Brit Chadashah: **Jn. 2:20-36** Psalm: **67**

Today, I want to help you understand that it is not what we believe that is one of the biggest barriers to faith in the G-d of the Bible. In the last few messages, I have shown that what we believe is more than **reasonable** and that the supposed challenges to it are neither **scientific** nor even **sensible**. As I share my faith with those who ask me a reason for the hope that is within me, I have only encountered two honest objections to a belief in the supernatural G-d of the Bible: "It cannot be" and "I don't want it to be". They are afraid of spiritual accountability.

You see, some people find the idea of an **impersonal universe**, engaged in an **evolutionary struggle** towards ever **higher planes** of existence **more comfortable** than the concept of a personal G-d who is observing our every move and who will hold us **accountable** to five levels of **moral** and **spiritual accountability**: Cosmos, Conscience, Culture, Circumstances and Canon.

How do you answer people who do not even want to examine the idea of a personal G-d whose judgment will determine our eternal destiny? First of all, we must never be pulled into an argument, as if we had something to prove (2 Tim. 2:24-26). You see, some people feel that if they can somehow demolish our arguments, they have somehow disproved G-d – **in much the same way as those foolish people who once thought the world was flat and supposed that if they suppressed the idea by killing everyone who did not believe them, and then the world would actually be flat!** Reality is not a democracy which can be voted in and voted out.

Let me say firmly that **faith** does not establish **truth**; it **recognizes** it, **embraces** it and **integrates** its requirements into every area of the believer's life. It is true that without faith it is impossible to please G-d (Heb. 11:6), but that is not the whole picture. On the Day of Judgment, there will be those who claim entrance into our Messiah's Kingdom because they have **prophesied** and **performed miracles** in His name, but they never really knew Him. They did not see Him poor, hungry, sick, naked and in prison because their kind of faith without works was dead. James says that even the devil believes and trembles because **saving faith** has two aspects which he will never embrace.

Besides acknowledging the truth, saving faith involves a **sincere repentance** and a **sustained devotional intimacy** where instead of worrying about anything, you pray about everything so that the peace of G-d upholds your heart and mind. In other words, saving faith is a **surrender of spiritual autonomy** and the **embracing of spiritual accountability** and many people are not willing to live this way. Sometimes it is because they want to run their own lives and do what they want when they want to and be answerable to no one.

Sometimes it is because they have a **false idea** of what it means to repent and to accept **personal spiritual accountability**. They have a Bart Simpson-like idea of a stern, unfriendly, critical G-d who is a bully and whose regimentation attempts to crush **individuality** and **creativity** – and where Heaven is thought of as the **great prison camp** in the sky.

Biblical spirituality is neither oppressive, nor does it try and crush our free will. I John 5:3 says that the love of G-d consists of keeping His commandments, because they are not grievous – in other words, they do not cramp our style, **they empower that part of us which prevents us from turning into Homer** – our conscience. Those who are war with their conscience will not come to the light for fear that their works would be revealed to be darkness (John 3:17-21).

Here darkness means that which is motivated by the **works of the flesh** (selfishness, anger, strife, greedy ambition and using every trick in the book to get ahead, and stay ahead). Biblical spirituality is based on **setting our conscience free** and **empowering** it to do that which is right, acceptable, good and pleasing (Rom. 12:1, 2).

We need to understand that we are the **moral image of G-d**, not the **physical image**. The only spiritual power we are born with is moral and at birth we are neutral vessels, equipped with the ability to discern what is good and what is evil (Gen. 4:7). It is the development of this **moral imperative** or the **suppression** of our moral nature, **which will determine the success of our spirituality**. In other words, **if do not learn to listen to our own conscience, we will never develop a taste for biblical spirituality.** We all have spiritual baggage and we all have moral flaws that we are called to confront and to conquer, so that our conscience becomes an **acceptable candle** which G-d's presence wants to light. Faith must be based on spirituality.

Whenever we violate our own conscience, we are undermining the foundation of His Word and our spirituality begins to **flicker**, to **smoke** and is reduced to an **ember**, instead of a flame. It is this flickering, this smouldering smoke of moral compromise which prevents believers from having an effective witness to the lives around them. How about you? I Tim. 5:22 outlines both the **problem** and the **solution**. Some people are placed into positions of leadership with a flawed spirituality and their **moral infection** poisons the communities they lead, but that is not our problem.

I meet many people who will not darken the doors of a house of worship because they have encountered so much **hypocrisy** and **moral compromise**. I do not discount their tales of woe – you see, I have tales of my own to tell and I tell them something which is both **comforting** and **terrifying** - the judgment of G-d begins with the House of Faith (I Peter 4:17-19; I Cor. 4:5; Rom. 2:13-16; Eccl. 12:13, 14). **Nobody gets away with nothing forever** – if they do not work it out in this life, they will suffer loss in the next – how about you? We are warned not to participate in the sins of another – it is our job to keep our own selves pure.

We cannot use the **negative example** of moral compromise and hypocrisy to justify our own lack of **spiritual credibility** and **moral integrity**. **If we are not involved in a relationship of positive tension with our own conscience, with our own image of G-d, then we will not come to the Author and Finisher of our faith who will reveal our moral/spiritual folly and its eternal consequences.**

I know that some people have sincere questions about what the Bible teaches and I want to dialogue with them, **because their lack of faith has not dismantled their spirituality** - their **conscience**. There are some who are walking according to the light they have and are trying to be good:

"What is freedom? Rightly understood,
But a universal licence to be good."

These are the people who are **ripe for the harvest** because they are in **positive tension** with their **conscience**, either because they are doing the best they know how, or because they are doing what they know is not right and are **unwilling captives** whose conscience is chained in a grave yard, or drawing water from a well for husband number six. How about you? ***If you do not listen to your own conscience, which you were born with and which you are called to cherish and strengthen, you will not listen to the voice of G-d's Spirit, or G-d's Word.***

This is because the kind of **faith response** the Gospel calls for is a **conscience based repentance** which tells the **truth** and takes **responsibility** to be **accountable** to a higher truth, and which is built on the **rock of our obedience** – as we learn to walk on the **straight** and **narrow**, so our wounded spirit/conscience may be made **better** and not **worse**. It is also a commitment to take the **ways of escape** He has always provided you with, even before you came to faith, in order that your heart and your life will be a place where your conscience flourishes and **roots out** the sins of the flesh and of the spirit.

Let me finish with a distinction between these **two categories of sin**. The **sins of the flesh** are outlined in Gal. 5:19-21 and deal with the snares which our carnal nature tries to use to capture and to enslave our conscience to the lusts and drives of our flesh. The **sins of the spirit** have more to do with spiritual conflict, where our carnal nature tries to wear a moral disguise, similar to the threefold categories of temptation our L-rd overcame in the wilderness.

I have taught on these before, so let's do some review. First there is **temptation**, which is the drive to **violate moral standards** and **consciously do that which we know to be wrong**. Sometimes what we feel is wrong is not wrong, but until we have worked through our understanding of the right and wrong in a situation, **it is better to err on the side of doing what we feel is right**. It is this commitment to **engage** and to **empower** our conscience which will open us up to be shown the difference on a **more mature, biblical level** (Phil. 3:15, 16; Heb. 5:11-14)

Next there is **condemnation**, where the horror of our sin is shown to us, devoid of the majesty of G-d's forgiveness (2 Co. 2:5-11). It is kind of like being told you have a **fatal disease** without any discussion of **the possibility of a cure**. G-d shines His light into our darkness so that we may abandon the darkness and flee into His light and not remain **crouching** in the darkness, like some Gollum gnawing on the **horror of our deeds** until **hopelessness** overwhelms us and we either take our own life, or return to a life of sin to escape the horror of our own guilt.

Lastly, there is **confusion** (has G-d really said?) where spirituality and morality are no longer based on the **clear moral/spiritual, objective teachings of Scripture** but on a carnal agenda where **material profit** (fame, fortune and power) is the **promised product** of spirituality and where the absence of material profit (fame, fortune and power) is blamed on the lack of spirituality (or faith).

Another version of this confusion is where people are told that **they should break certain moral standards, in order to accomplish a supposedly higher spiritual objective** – this is why certain groups and cults use deception to win converts – **lying** to outsiders in order to demonstrate their **obedience** to the leader or **consciously making moral compromises in order to supposedly grow spiritually**.

Neither the sins of the flesh, nor the sins of the spirit are acceptable options for believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Our faith, that is what we believe, must be based on a **grass root's spirituality** where we have come to the light in order to **empower** our conscience. **Once we begin to listen to our conscience, we can begin to listen to G-d, because the voice of our conscience is the voice He planted in our spirits in order to call us to Him.**

Spirituality cannot grow in a life full of moral compromises. Spirituality can begin to grow in a life which wants to set its conscience free and which is willing to do battle with **bad habits**, with **past woundings**, and with **past chains** until personal **moral** and personal **spiritual** freedom sets our conscience free to walk in **the ways of the L-rd** (Derek Adonai – Gen. 18:19) from the depths of our being (Ps. 51:8), right up into the heights of our lives. How about you?

At B'nai Chayim we will uphold **high standards** of personal **moral accountability** and personal **spiritual accountability** so that all of us, Jew and Gentile, young and old, rich and poor, can learn to **confront** and to **overcome** all the snares which try to **imprison our conscience**, instead of setting it free to walk in all the ways of the L-rd, both in our conscience and in our faith. How about you? Do you have **spiritual issues** you are struggling with? Do you have **moral issues of conscience** you are wrestling with? Keep on wrestling and struggling!

The success of these struggles and wrestling matches will determine the **spiritual health** and the **spiritual vitality** of our personal and our communal walk with the L-rd. The L-rd requires that our obedience be willing and that our conscience be empowered by His Word so that His Spirit can be our guide. How about you? May your conscience not be **sealed** by the mark of iniquity (of the beast - I Tim. 4:2), but may it be **empowered** by seal of G-d (2 Tim. 2:19). Let's pray.