

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

They Masquerade Christianity In The Guise Of Judaism

For years, Jews for Judaism has visited messianic conferences held by groups like Jews for Jesus.

On one occasion in New Mexico, my colleague, Rabbi Michael Skobac, and I took hotel rooms and spent our time in the lobby. If approached, we were available to dialogue with Jews about their decision to accept Christianity.

During one friendly conversation with a “messianic Jew,” a leader of the conference approached us. Upon hearing my name, he got agitated and insulted me, saying,

“Rabbi Kravitz. You are merely a rabbinic Jew. We are biblical Jews.”

This messianic leader, and most Jews who accept Jesus, consider Judaism to be a false religion that follows the words of men. They reject rabbinical Judaism and believe messianic faith in Jesus is based solely on the word of God.

In response to his insult, I asked him, “*what’s on your head?*” When he replied, “*a kippa,*” I pointed out that wearing a kippah isn’t in the Bible but is a rabbinic enactment. I then asked him about the “*tzitzit*” he was wearing and remarked that the eight fringes and five knots he was wearing are also not mentioned in the Bible but are rabbinic.

I made the same point about the Shabbat candles they lit Friday night and the black and square tefillin they put on Sunday morning. With each example, I stressed that the details of these mitzvot are not to be found in the Bible but are based on rabbinic tradition.

I then declared, “*you have the audacity to say that I am ‘merely a rabbinic Jew,’ and you are a biblical Jew when everything you do to masquerade your Christianity in the guise of Judaism is based on rabbinic tradition.*”

His insult backfired because I showed him the hypocrisy of condemning rabbinical Judaism while using it when convenient.

continued on reverse

Rabbinical Judaism is biblical. This week's Torah portion Yisro (Exodus 18:1-20:23), describes the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai and tells us that Moses, with God's permission, institutes a judicial system. He appoints wise judges to assist the Jews in keeping the Torah and to teach them *"the path they shall follow and the deeds they shall do"* (Exodus 18:20). This momentous event laid the foundation for the God-given "rabbinical" tradition.

The Bible emphasizes the legitimacy of this tradition with the directive, *"judges and officers you shall appoint"* (Deuteronomy 16:18-20) and the statement *"it is not for man's sake that you judge but for God's"* (2 Chronicles 19:6).

The sages of the Talmud (Shabbat 23a) and Maimonides state that the biblical source for following the rabbis is the verse, *"act according to the law they instruct you and the judgment they tell you"* (Deuteronomy 17:11).

Maimonides (Laws of Blessing 11:3) explains that Jews who observe rabbinic commandments are, in fact, following a Biblical commandment to obey the decisions of the Jewish religious authorities. Maimonides points out that blessings on rabbinic commandments can be understood as "God's command" because of the authority invested in the rabbis by God.

Contrary to what other religions claim, rabbinical Judaism is an intricate part of God's plan to bring Divine spirituality into all aspects of our life. By endowing man with the wisdom and tools to apply the Torah to our lives, we become God's partner and fulfill our biblical mandate to perfect the world.

Shabbat Shalom,

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