Non-Conformists In Our Messiah's Image

Summary

Are you sure you want to be Messiah-like? The Bible's heroes were rarely comfortable people to be around — this article catalogues just how strange true obedience has always looked, and why "drab conformity" is itself a kind of carnality.

- A rapid survey of shocking behavior from Yah'shua and the prophets: eating with "sinners," healing on the Sabbath, Ezekiel's year-long sign, Isaiah's three years unclothed, Samson, Daniel's public prayer.
- Yahweh's "wonderfully predictable" character contrasted with His "wondrously unpredictable" methods.
- The call to a unique, Spirit-led calling rather than imitation of someone else's ministry style.

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Are you sure you want to be Messiah-like? If you think you are called as an Israelite to be part of a 'normal' ministry, think again!

Our Leader's behaviour shocked the religious establishment. The Messiah partied with crooks, drunks and prostitutes. A prostitute kissed his feet. He did things on the Sabbath he wasn't supposed to. He insulted dignitaries, calling them vipers, blind fools, whitewashed tombs and other names. Those closest to him usually had no idea what he was talking about - he's warning them about the Pharisees and they think he's complaining about leaving the bread behind - but to those outside his inner circle, the Messiah wasn't nearly so intelligible. He was acknowledged by demons and rejected by theologians. He spoke to a fever, a tree, even a storm. Before long, Yah'shua's sanity was called into question and at one stage his family came to take charge of him. He was forever messing up funerals, wrecking beggars' only source of income - their infirmities - and outraging religious leaders. He made goo with spit and smeared it on a blind beggar's eyes. He stuck his fingers in a man's ears, spat, and grabbed the man's tongue. How many *churches* would tolerate such ludicrous behaviour? He took a short-cut across the lake - without a boat. He sent two thousand swine hurtling to their death. He physically assaulted temple workers. No one - whether friends, family, admirers; devout, legalistic or lax - could agree with him for long.

Being the embodiment of divine perfection made our Messiah such an oddity that no one knew what to do with him. Yet our fallibility will not pave an easier road. The Messiah pledged us His Father's Spirit, and if we dare follow His orders we can expect to be regularly jarring people's sense of propriety and intelligence, just as He did. That's the way it has always been.

The works and lives of Scripture's heroes are reverently read in pulpits across the land. But if the Bible's characters revisited this planet, would they be honoured in our Congregation? Even the Pharisees revered dead prophets. It's the live ones that make us squirm. There's Yah'shua, who drank, and the Nazarites who abstained even from grapes. Solomon wore extravagant finery. Equally holy men wore rags. Paul's dress would get even an apostle black-listed in most Congregations.

Some lived in palaces and some in caves. Some were free-thinkers in the realm of personal hygiene. Many were in public disgrace, some were even outlaws, yet they refused to conform. The apostle Peter fished naked. Saul stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel. Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for three years. Whether they had ice in their veins or permafrost in their brains, you can decide, but they established new frontiers in outlandish behaviour.

You'd think Ezekiel was vying for the weirdest entry in the Guinness Book of Records, lying on just one side for more than a year, fuelling his fire with dung to cook needlessly-rationed food *(Yahweh wanted him to use human feces, but Ezekiel was too straight for that)*. He dug through a wall, built make-believe siege works against a brick he called 'Jerusalem', and attacked shavings of his hair. Hosea got involved with a woman. Pious eyebrows must have shot through the roof! Yet these were not the hare-brained schemes of religious nuts. Men of Yahweh were obeying the holy leadings of the Almighty.

See Samson, flat on his face - tripped over his hair again. Nearby is a Nazarite, desperately trying to suppress his laughter *(laugh at Samson and you laugh all the way to hospital)*. Under divine direction, the Nazarite has shaved his entire head. Here we have two men led of His Holy Spirit. One we'd reject because his hair has never seen a razor, the other because his hair has seen a razor. Everyone knows saints must conform to our standards.

I could prattle on forever about the mad-cap antics of clowns like Samson, the long-haired lout who brought the house down - on top of himself; Jacob, who had an angel in a headlock; Daniel, who ended up on the lion's menu, not because he prayed but because he insisted on praying on his knees with the windows wide open. I could lampoon whole armies - like the one that snuck off to battle insisting that the choir go first, or Joshua's troops who waddled around in circles to the *(short-lived)* amusement of Jericho's inhabitants. *(How embarrassing to be in that dizzy army. The locals must have died laughing)*. I'm telling you, you and I are the first sane Israelites that have ever lived!

But honestly, has Yahweh stopped prompting people to break with convention, or have we stopped heeding his prompting? Has Yahweh exhausted his creativity, or are we exhausting his patience? I am being neither radical nor dogmatic. I'm simply pleading for an army of Messiah-centered saints, dedicated to allowing the Spirit of Yahweh to express Himself through us in the way He chooses, rather than the way our tomato brains think He should move. If your life and ministry seems bland, that's fine, provided it's a calling, not a cop-out.

Virtually no one in our modern world seeks the Yahweh of all knowledge for truly innovative ways of portraying the nature and message of Yahweh. I am not talking about gimmicks, but of being channels of Yahweh's splendour; free, like the prophets of old, from the straight-jacket of human tradition; willing to carry obedience to the extreme of appearing the greatest oddball since John penned Revelation. *(John, by the way, was locked up before he wrote his bizarre book. In our era, he'd be put away after he wrote it. It was non-Israelites who had him put away, but who would it be today?)*

Part of us recoils from a God so superior that His acts take us by surprise. It's unsettling to have a God so vibrant, so bursting with life and creativity and personality, that in comparison the most dynamic of us seem listless and boring. We'd much prefer Yahweh to be a machine; as coldly predictable as a lump of metal trapped by a simple law of physics. There's something reassuring about an idol. Within us lurks a

desire to fashion a god in the image of a cuddly teddy bear that says 'I love you' when we press the right button and never disturbs us by doing or asking the unexpected.

From cover to cover, the Bible demonstrates that Yahweh's character is wonderfully predictable and his methods wondrously unpredictable. When Yah'shua healed, for instance, you could never be sure whether he would visit, heal from a distance, or initially ignore the person. You would never know whether he would address demons or the illness, speak of sin or faith, bless, ask questions, spit, lay hands, or tell the person to wash, or stretch, or pick up a bed, or see a priest.

Lest we try limiting Yahweh to the vast array of Yah'shua's earthly methods, the rest of Scripture shows the Most High healing by the use of shadows, handkerchiefs, oil, fig paste, a dead prophet's bones, an image of a snake, lying on the afflicted, dipping in the Jordan - and if you want a full list, you have still missed the point. For every impossibility, the Almighty has unlimited possibilities.

So let's not think that service must conform to our petty notions before it can sparkle with divine greatness. Let's cut the ropes and let Yahweh express his boundless creativity through us. We are so tradition-bound as to confuse ministry with mimicry. Unless we are called to a musty, second-hand vocation, we conclude we're not called at all. Don't be a buzzard circling the corpse of a worn-out ministry when you could be an eagle soaring with His Holy Spirit to fresh expressions of the grandeur of Yahweh.

Every human mind is chained to established practice and custom. All that distinguishes any of us is the length of our leash. The implications haunt us all.

Like the Pharisees of old, we can be horrified at the actions of our spiritual forebears - adamant that we could not possibly be so blinded by religious prejudice as to oppose a work of Yahweh - and yet make grave misjudgements of the same magnitude that Yahweh-fearing people have been making for millennia.

We make no plea for blind tolerance. That's one of the fad heresies of our age, and even the bigoted Pharisees wrongly tolerated temple money-changers. But whether they erred on the side of acceptance or rejection, the Pharisees' error was always the same: they let the accepted norms of their group ring so loud in their ears that they couldn't hear the heartbeat of Yahweh. Like us, they were sure they would never make such a mistake. So though we don't preach mindless acceptance, we urge caution - especially since Yahweh's primary concern is to enlighten us concerning His leading of our life, not His personal leading for everyone else.

Yahweh is most elevated, not by a hundred imitations of ‘Billy Graham’, but by a hundred common folk, each being true to their unique calling. The result will much more accurately reflect the multi-faceted character of Yahweh. Our great Yahweh is a Humorist as well as a Judge; a Musician as well as an Orator; a Servant and a King. Just look at creation: Yahweh is an Artist, an Engineer, an Inventor, a Gardener. He's a Bio-chemist, a Mid-wife, a Philosopher, a Labourer, an Architect - does the list ever end?

In the vastness of Yahweh's nature there must be a tiny element that you can portray better than anyone else ever has - if you accept the challenge of a truly Spirit-led life, instead of a pale imitation of someone else. Just as the life-styles of Yah'shua and John the Baptist differed enormously, there should be a rich diversity within the body of the Messiah's Congregation. Unfortunately, a warped view of holiness and/or submission often leads to drab conformity. In reality, this is carnality - the inability to love or appreciate anyone different from ourselves.

To reach the many different people and groups he encountered, Paul became 'all things to all men'. If Paul, as an individual, could contemplate this, imagine the breadth that should be evident within the Congregation as a whole. This is possible only if we allow His Holy Spirit to nurture our individuality.

Don't despise the unique blend of abilities bestowed on you by the keenest Mind in the universe. Stop envying the life of others and start clarifying your own call. If, to your thinking, that call seems insignificant, the thing to be ashamed of, is not your calling, but your thinking!

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