

The Need for Body Ministry in the Messianic Movement

by J.K. McKee posted 01 February, 2005 www.tnnonline.net

One of the things that has really struck me over the past few months, especially since I have traveled and spoken with various Messianic groups and fellowships (throughout 2004), is the strong reality that as a Bible teacher my writings and messages affect real people with real lives. People will read something of mine or hear an audio message, and then formulate a decision or an opinion based on what I have said. This is quite sobering, because I remember having to make some rather difficult decisions in my own life as I adopted a Messianic lifestyle. These decisions were more than just deciding what the Bible was really telling me or what theologically matched up. These decisions affected friendships that I had and changed my outlook on the world. Many of these decisions were difficult, but I knew that the Lord would honor me for my faith and He has been gracious to give me a good support group of family and friends.

At the Shavuot 2004 gathering in Orlando, it became abundantly obvious to me that there is a strong need for body ministry in the Messianic movement. While certainly there is a need for us to have well-examined and documented exegesis of the Scriptures, this must be balanced with an appropriate spirituality and the reality that what we say as teachers of the Word affects people. There were several people who came up to me at the Shavuot 2004 gathering who had testimonies of how my writings had impacted them and had helped them in specific situations. I offer some of these examples to you, especially if you are leading a Messianic fellowship or Bible study. **Remember that people are looking to you for leadership, and you have the responsibility to lead appropriately.**

I have about 2-3 Messianic friends who I try to communicate with on a semi-weekly basis. They are my own age and are in their 20s, and I do my best to ask how they are doing, how I can pray for them, I encourage them, and most importantly I try to get to know them better. One of the ways that we grow in our walk of faith, and establish ourselves, is getting to know the Lord through His people. Each one of us encounters the same sorts of challenges as the other, and there is a need for us to know who our friends are, and how we can help one another. I know that some of the Messianic friends my age are very new to this walk of faith, so in addition to praying for them on a daily basis, I do my best to ask them where they are with God and if they need any specific help in areas of their lives. I am honest with them and tell them if I need help in my life. Oftentimes people are unaware of the fact that those of us in ministry need to be ministered to every bit as much as the next person.

At Shavuot 2004, I encountered many people, most of whom are much older than I, and I could not believe that they were impacted by a person who was 23 (as of Spring 2004), and barely a year out of college. A gentleman from Virginia, who had been a pastor for many years, and has been in the Messianic movement for several years, came up to me and let me know how much he appreciated my work and how it has helped him and his wife to communicate the truths that God is restoring to His people to others. He encouraged me to keep doing what I am doing, that we need people who will keep the faith and stand up for the truth, but most importantly that he appreciated that I try to be fair and scholarly in what I write and say. This really meant a great deal to me, and indeed ministered to me, because I often do not receive that many positive e-mails or correspondence with people. To hear it from a person who was about three times my own age really was an encouragement.

Another couple I encountered, which was from the South, had told me how they had to leave their Messianic congregation because of the strong influence of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. This couple was afraid that people would be led astray from faith in Yeshua, and all the research that they had done on this subject led them to conclude that it was occultic and Satanic. They had sent me an e-mail where they asked what my position on Kabbalah was. I sent them a long quotation from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* which basically stated that it was derived from the occult and Judaism as a whole considered it heretical. They let me know how this confirmed what they knew in the Spirit was wrong, and appreciated the fact that I did not hide what our ministry's position was on the subject for the sake of so-called "unity." This couple encouraged me

to keep doing what I am doing as well, and I let them know that I will keep them in our prayers so that their fellowship situation might work out and that they can help those who are being influenced by errant theologies.

A strong spirit of unity and brotherhood was evidenced at Shavuot 2004, and having worked the gathering I can let you know that everything went smoothly and without incident. I think people are tired of some of the divisions that have plagued the Messianic movement in recent years. People want to get beyond this and work together. But at the same time, we have to recognize that as individuals we have personal needs.

One of the most unique things that I experienced at Shavuot 2004 was the unity exemplified at the Q&A Panel Discussion on Monday morning. While those watching the recording may think we were all stiff because we had our arms folded—in actuality all of us were freezing sitting directly under the air conditioning ducts! I have never seen a Q&A go so well, where everyone wanted to answer the questions and truly help those in attendance. The most critical question that I believe was asked was the question about prayer. While the question mostly had to deal with the use of Hebrew liturgy in one's personal prayer time, the answers that the various speakers, and myself, gave had to deal with how we as Messianic Believers need to have a disciplined prayer time. Much of the Hebrew liturgy used in traditional prayers are hymns and praises to God. And certainly, I do use many of them in my quiet times, and am convicted when I pray them. But most importantly, I emphasized to the audience that all of us need to spend time with the Lord, ask Him to convict us and refine us, and uplift others in the Body of Messiah.

There is a strong need right now for body ministry in the Messianic movement. All too often, over the past few years we have had to deal with controversial theologies that have divided us and let us be scattered. I know that as editor of TNN Online, I deal with issues that are controversial, and I must pace myself to decide which topics are worth addressing and which topics I should just wait on. There is a sweet lady from Alabama, with whom I have become good friends, who lets me know that she prays for me everyday, because she knows that in the type of ministry I have I deal not only with intense Biblical research, but also am coming against demonic strongholds. I know that I need this type of prayer and support, because I do not see things getting any easier or less challenging.

If there is one thing that I do know, it is that in my experience you would not be in the Messianic movement right now unless God has a special call on your life. Each one of us had had various life experiences that have molded us and led us to where we are today. We are the forerunners of something great, because many of us do sense in the Spirit that the masses are coming in. Right now, however, we have to be refined and lift up one another in spiritual support.

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