

## The Religious Trump Card

In many different games of cards, people play a hand following a suit. If someone does not have the suit that was led at the opening of the hand, they can play something called a “Trump Card.” This card, depending on the game, will most likely “trump” whatever has already been played resulting in the person who played that card winning the hand. Admittedly, I am not a card player. But I have started to see Messianics play a kind of “trump card” in religious discussions. This card comes out when the person really has no argument, or when they feel that they have been “beaten” theologically by their opponent. Now before I go on I should first say that perhaps one of the bigger problems here is the mindset that we are “opponents”, instead of what we really are... brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is true that within the body of the Messiah there are going to be a wide range of opinions and disagreements. The staff at TorahResource is working on a 31 day study of the Fruits of the Spirit. As I prepare for this, I am realizing more and more how the Lord wants us to be respectful and loving to our fellow believers.

Nevertheless, when we are expressing our theological opinions to each other, and one person feels that they are being out done, you might just see the trump card. It can come in several forms, but always looks basically the same. “What,” you might ask, “is the trump card?” It is when someone lays down what they consider to be irrefutable: “God told me.” Or perhaps “He is led by the Spirit.” Recently I have seen the trump card played in several different disagreements that I have had. Now granted, I am not the easiest person to talk to. I can tend to be harsh, loud and boisterous when it comes to debate. Although I have chalked this up to being passionate for the Word in the past, I am trying hard to be a more humble person to talk to. Yet, I find the playing of the religious trump card to almost be a bit offensive, and for several reasons.

As believers in the Messiah Yeshua, we should constantly be in prayer and in the word, asking the Lord to lead us. Paul tells us in Romans 8:9 that “you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,” so as believers we are all supposed to be “in the Spirit.” If someone is not being “led by the Spirit” then shouldn’t we wonder about their relationship with God?

Yesterday I ask someone if the person he was arguing on behalf of had any credentials when it came to Hebrew. He responded that this man was “led by the Spirit.” At first I was offended at the implication of this statement, i.e., this person is led by the Spirit and therefore is correct, ergo, if you disagree with him you are going against the Spirit, and therefore you are NOT led by the Spirit. But after I thought about it, I was more offended that this person was equating a false teaching with my God!

Last month I contacted a man about something he was teaching. I asked some general questions about the theology behind his teaching, and the theological backing he had to support this doctrine. After a short interchange this brother in the Lord told me that he has never in his life been closer to God, and that the Lord had shown him this teaching. I have no doubt that this man's relationship with the Lord has never been stronger. Just in our interaction I can tell that he is a brother who loves the Lord, has a strong marriage, and truly believes that the work he is doing is furthering the Kingdom. The problem is that he has no scriptural basis for what he is teaching. From a theological standpoint it is quite clear that the theology this person was teaching is not rooted in truth. So do I think this person was being led by an evil Spirit? Nonsense! This person falters from a common malady within much of the Messianic movement today, that is, a lack of education.

Now before you pick up the metaphorical stones to throw at me let me explain. I am not suggesting that everyone that is a leader, or is being used by God needs to have a four year degree. As we are in our faith communities we are constantly building up others, and training our young adults and our children to become equipped to handle the word, and to answer God's calling. The other point here is that serving God and serving others, answering "The Call" does not always mean getting up in front of groups to speak, or writing the next best seller. Sometimes answer the call means putting up chairs for your community. Giving someone a hug and an ear to talk to over a cup of coffee; preparing some thoughts, or even some good questions for a small Bible study during the week. Or even asking the right question to the leader that is teaching. So what about those that feel led to teach? Or those that decide God is calling them to write?

I have a friend who lives in Kentucky. He came out to Tacoma about four years ago, and was seeking guidance from my father on what direction he should go in life. After he left there was a significant amount of prayer from him, his family and even our community. Cole decided after much prayer and counsel that God was calling him to be a dentist. This fits Cole well and I can already see how God is going to use this strong believing brother in the Lord to help people, and to shine the light of our Messiah into the lives of those he comes into contact with. God's leading for Cole was to become a dentist. What was Cole's response? He finished college and got into dental school. Cole heard the calling of God in his life and decided to equip himself to answer that call.

But this is not the action many Messianics are taking. I see many people saying they can study on their own, and then go and expound on the Holy Word of God, and lead people in their Spiritual life. If Cole would have told me that he had decided that God had called him to be a dentist and so he was going to teach himself the art of dentistry, I am quite confident that no one would let him near their teeth. Yet people are jumping on board with teachers who are handling something

much more important than their teeth... they're intent on affecting the spiritual direction of God's people! And if questioned about the false doctrine they are teaching others, they simply pull that trump card out from their sleeve and play it with a smile: "God gave me this teaching" or "God confirmed that what I have seen is true."

As many of you know, I have had the extreme pleasure of interviewing some top scholars for TorahResource Radio. In the past few months I have interviewed Dr. N.T. Wright, an Anglican Bishop in the Church of England. I have had the pleasure of talking with Dr. Paul Wegner, a Baptist dispensationalist. And most recently I interviewed Dr. Michael Brown, a charismatic Wesleyan. These men are all on different ends of the theological spectrum, but what is the one thing they all have in common? They are all well respected experts in their fields. Dr. N.T. Wright is one of the leading Pauline scholars in the world today. Do I agree with his theology? Not across the board, but I do respect the fact that when it comes to Paul, Dr. Wright is a leading authority. Dr. Wegner is a "Old Testament" Scholar, and has been published numerous times, including in the notes of the ESV Study Bible. Do I agree with Dr. Wegner's views of Torah? No, of course not, but I used one of his books as a textbook in my class on How We Got Our Bible, and fully respect his knowledge of the history and formation of the Bible. Do I agree with Dr. Brown on his view of predestination? As a Calvinist I think it's pretty clear the answer is "no," but Dr. Brown has proven himself as an expert in the Hebrew Language. None of these men "keep the Torah," in terms of keeping the Sabbath, or eating a kosher diet. But they are Godly men, who are well respected in specific fields of their expertise. They have done the work and although I might not agree with them on some things, their insight and opinion should not be pushed aside. I can also say that every single one of these men believe that they are being led by the Spirit in the specific ministries in which they are engaged.

It is my opinion that if you truly believe the Lord is calling you to teach or to write, it will serve you well to become prepared for that calling. Not by teaching yourself Hebrew from the internet, or by being self-taught. Part of the wonderful thing about becoming educated is being pushed by your teachers to engage with lines of thinking which otherwise you may have overlooked or set aside. I understand how hard it is for Messianics to take classes at a Christian seminary, but sometimes it's in the debates with our Christian brothers and sisters that we learn the most. It is amazing to me how the people in the Messianic movement that are teaching theologies such as the Aleph Tav Bible, or placing the pictographic meaning of letters into words and interpreting the Bible that way, all have one thing in common... They are all self-taught in Hebrew.

Do I believe that you have to have a formal education to be used by God? No. But if you believe that the Lord is leading you to teach from the Hebrew Bible,

or for the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, then take the proper steps to equip yourself. Take a Hebrew class, take a Greek class. If you believe that the Lord is leading you to lead a community, it should be on your heart and mind to begin to educate yourself to be able to perform that task and perform it correctly.

Playing the “trump card” puts down other believers who might disagree with you, and are themselves being lead by the Spirit. Playing the trump card diminishes the authority that a statement like “the Lord told me” should carry. My father has always taught me that if a person believes the Lord is speaking to them, or that the Lord is leading them to do something, it will be confirmed in several ways. 1) It will not contradict what the Scripture says. 2) They will seek counsel, and the Lord will make the majority of counsel agree that this is what the Lord wants. 3) If the person has a believing spouse, that spouse will agree. 4) And finally the Lord will bring to pass what He has Himself led the person to do.

We as believers are all “called” to walk by the leading of the Spirit. If someone disagrees with us we should step back and look at the evidence and the Word, instead of trying to win the hand with the Trump Card.