

Acknowledging vs. Denying Yeshua

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We read in Luke 22:31-34 that Yeshua said to Simon Peter:

"Shim'on, Shim'on, listen! The Adversary demanded to have you people for himself, to sift you like wheat! But I prayed for you, Shim'on, that your trust might not fail. And you, once you have turned back in repentance, strengthen your brothers!" Shim'on said to him, "Lord, I am prepared to go with you both to prison and to death!" Yeshua replied, "I tell you, Kefa, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me."

We know that, despite his protestations, Peter did deny Yeshua – not once, but three times as Yeshua predicted. I remember the first time I encountered this in the Bible, and I remember thinking to myself: “What a gutless weakling Peter was, to allow his fear of being identified as one of Yeshua’s disciples to cause him to deny the Lord. Well, I was never placed in the same kind of jeopardy as Peter. I never flat out denied Yeshua after I came to faith, but there were times when my intentional silence or my laugh at someone’s course humor amounted to the same thing. I am bringing this to your attention in the hope that you will not follow suit when the temptation to deny Yeshua is placed at your doorstep. If it hasn’t already, it will be.

The temptation to deny the Lord can be subtle, and can come in many forms. Usually it comes from someone you want to please or someone you do not want to anger. It can occur when a co-worker blasphemes the name of the Lord and you do not, at the very least, walk away. It can occur when your employer makes a rude remark about the Lord’s chosen people and you do not correct him or admit that you are one of them. It can occur when you go along with a joke that mocks marriage, or mothers-in-law, or sex – things that the Lord gave us and cares deeply about. It can occur when we hold back from witnessing to our parents, or when, as Jews, we acquiesce to eating *treif* in order to be social, or when we mislead about our belief in Yeshua in our attempt to pursue Jewish conversion or apply for *aliyah* to Israel.

None of this is new – not only temptations to deny Yeshua, but to deny God Himself. Here are two examples, from the *Tanach*, of men who were victorious over such temptations:

Job 1:6-22: *It happened one day that the sons of God came to serve ADONAI, and among them came the Adversary [i.e. Satan]. ADONAI asked the Adversary, "Where are you coming from?" The Adversary answered ADONAI, "From roaming through the earth, wandering here and there." ADONAI asked the Adversary, "Did you notice my servant Iyov, [i.e. Job] that there's no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil?" The Adversary answered ADONAI, "Is it for nothing that Iyov fears God? You've put a protective hedge around him, his house and everything he has. You've prospered his work, and his livestock are spread out all over the land. But if you reach out your hand and touch whatever he has, without doubt he'll curse you to your face!" ADONAI said to the Adversary, "Here! Everything he has is in your hands, except that you are not to lay a finger on his person." Then the Adversary went out from the presence of ADONAI. One day when Iyov's sons and daughters*

were eating and drinking in their oldest brother's house, a messenger came to him and said, "The oxen were plowing, with the donkeys grazing near them, when a raiding party from Sh'va came and carried them off; they put the servants to the sword too, and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another one came and said, "Fire from God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants; it completely destroyed them, and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another one came and said, "The Kasdim [i.e. Chaldeans], three bands of them, fell on the camels and carried them off; they put the servants to the sword too, and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another one came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, when suddenly a strong wind blew in from over the desert. It struck the four corners of the house, so that it fell on the young people; they are dead, and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you." Iyov got up, tore his coat, shaved his head, fell down on the ground and worshipped; he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return there. ADONAI gave; ADONAI took; blessed be the name of ADONAI." In all this Iyov neither committed a sin nor put blame on God."

Satan tempted Job to deny God, but he did not. Other calamities befell Job even after that, and still he did not deny God. He passed the test.

Daniel 3:8-18: "But then some Kasdim approached and began denouncing the Jews. They said to N'vukhadnetzar the king, "May the king live forever! Your majesty, you have ordered that everyone who hears sound of the horn, pipe, harp, zither, lute, bagpipe and the rest of the musical instruments is to fall down and worship the gold statue; and that whoever does not fall down and worship is to be thrown into a blazing hot furnace. There are some Jews whom you have put in charge of the affairs of the province of Bavel, Shadrakh, Meishakh and 'Aved-N'go; and these men, your majesty, have paid no attention to you. They do not serve your gods, and they do not worship the gold statue you set up." In a raging fury N'vukhadnetzar ordered that Shadrakh, Meishakh and 'Aved-N'go be brought. When the men had been brought before the king, N'vukhadnetzar said to them, "Shadrakh! Meishakh! 'Aved-N'go! Is it true that you neither serve my gods nor worship the gold statue I set up? All right, then. If you are prepared, when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, harp, zither, lute, bagpipe and the rest of the musical instruments, to fall down and worship the gold statue, very well. But if you won't worship, you will immediately be thrown into a blazing hot furnace - and what god will save you from my power then?" Shadrakh, Meishakh and 'Aved-N'go answered the king, "Your question doesn't require an answer from us. Your majesty, if our God, whom we serve, is able to save us, he will save us from the blazing hot furnace and from your power. But even if he doesn't, we want you to know, your majesty, that we will neither serve your gods nor worship the gold statue which you have set up."

Well, we know how that turned out. The three men were thrown into the furnace and miraculously emerged unscathed. They were tempted to deny God but they did not, and so they passed the test. Notice that they did not know whether or not God would bring them through the ordeal alive, yet they had no fear because they knew that, either way, they were in God's hands. The antidote for what would otherwise have been fear was their faith.

The temptation to worship heathen gods is not something we normally encounter in the western world today, but circumstances that tempt us to deny God or Yeshua are, nevertheless, common. Rabbi David (of *Tikvat Israel*)¹ and I recently discussed this as being a serious problem for some among us, and he shared several Scriptures with me that I would like to pass on to you.

The first two make it abundantly clear that:

(1) We Are to Publicly Acknowledge Who Yeshua Is.

Philippians 2:9-11: *“Therefore God raised him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name; that in honor of the name given Yeshua, every knee will bow - in heaven, on earth and under the earth - and every tongue will acknowledge that Yeshua the Messiah is ADONAI - to the glory of God the Father.”*

Hebrews 13:15: *“Through him, therefore, let us offer God a sacrifice of praise continually. For this is the natural product of lips that acknowledge his name.”*

The second two Scriptures tell us that:

(2) Publicly acknowledging Yeshua Enhances Our Life with God.

Romans 10:13: *“... everyone who calls on the name of ADONAI will be delivered.”*

1 John 4:15: *“If someone acknowledges that Yeshua is the Son of God, God remains united with him, and he with God.”*

To be clear, these Scriptures do not mean that if we have not had the occasion to publicly acknowledge Yeshua, that our life with God is somehow flawed. They do, however, connect our willingness to acknowledge Yeshua with being blessed by Him.

The next Scripture tells us that:

(3) Publicly Acknowledging Yeshua Is a Component of Spiritual Warfare.

1 John 4:3: *“... and every spirit which does not acknowledge Yeshua is not from God - in fact, this is the spirit of the Anti-Messiah. You have heard that he is coming. Well, he's here now, in the world already!”*

Here the Scripture is not speaking about men failing to acknowledge Yeshua; it is speaking about spirits. The relevance though is that there is a connection between acknowledging Yeshua and

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belonging to God. And because the Scripture is speaking about spirits, there is the suggestion that being unwilling to publicly confess Yeshua can result in becoming vulnerable to the wrong spirit.

A fourth set of Scriptures tells us that:

(4) Our Reluctance or Refusal to Confess Yeshua Is Often Due to Fear of Consequences.

John 9:22: *“The parents said this because they were afraid of the Judeans, for the Judeans had already agreed that anyone who acknowledged Yeshua as the Messiah would be banned from the synagogue.”*

John 12:42: *“Nevertheless, many of the leaders did trust in him; but because of the P'rushim [i.e. the Pharisees] they did not say so openly, out of fear of being banned from the synagogue;”*

Even today, most synagogues in the wider Jewish world would ban us for openly proclaiming Yeshua, and some would even ban us for believing in Him privately. Rabbi David has an interesting story to tell about when he was studying in England, and a Jewish organization that learned of his Messianic beliefs banned him from attending their program of invited guest lecturers.

This fear of consequences that can result from proclaiming our faith in Yeshua is at the very heart of why I chose to speak on this subject today. There are forces afoot – spiritual forces – that want to shut our mouths about Yeshua, and they attempt to do it by threatening us with consequences. At times it seems that we are at war with our Jewish brothers, but our war is not with them; it is rather with spirits that are in opposition to God.

Ephesians 6:12 is ever so applicable here as it says:

“For we are not struggling against human beings, but against the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers governing this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.”

But the Scripture does not end there, leaving us with no remedy. The next verse, verse 13, instructs us:

“So take up every piece of war equipment God provides; so that when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist; and when the battle is won, you will still be standing.”

Well, our war equipment is not conventional, nor is it of this world. It is the truth about Yeshua, that sometimes has to be “shot” from the cannons of our mouths amidst barrages of threats and accusations that are hurled against us. Perhaps we desperately want the approval of our parents who are holding their approval hostage in the hope that we will give up this “Yeshua” nonsense. Or perhaps we want a promotion at work, or citizenship in Israel, and all we have to do to achieve them is to hide our belief in Yeshua or tell just a “little” lie. Well, we may win our battle that way and get what we want, but we will, at the same time, have contributed to setting back God’s victory in

the larger war. Not only that, but it will come back to hurt us personally, for Scripture says of such situations:

Matthew 10:32-33: *"Whoever acknowledges me in the presence of others I will also acknowledge in the presence of my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others I will disown before my Father in heaven."*

2 Peter 2:1: *"But among the people there were also false prophets, just as there will be false teachers among you. Under false pretenses they will introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and thus bring on themselves swift destruction."*

1 John 2:23: *"Everyone who denies the Son is also without the Father, but the person who acknowledges the Son has the Father as well."*

To quote Rabbi David:

(5) "Yeshua calls us to risk marginalization and mistreatment due to our identification with Him."

He continues:

*"This is part of the cost of what it means to follow Him – to be a disciple of Yeshua. We do not have a single example in the New Testament of either Yeshua or the *Shlichim* [i.e. the apostles] instructing someone to hide faith in Him. By contrast, there are hundreds of passages that encourage us to publicly share about who Yeshua is and to risk rejection, persecution, and other negative consequences as a result."*

On this note, it is instructive that we remember the following Scriptures and be willing to accept their implications in our lives:

Matthew 16:24-25: *"Then Yeshua told his talmidim, 'If anyone wants to come after me, let him say 'No' to himself, take up his execution-stake, and keep following me. For whoever wants to save his own life will destroy it, but whoever destroys his life for my sake will find it.'"*

Matthew 24:5-9: *"For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. You will hear the noise of wars nearby and the news of wars far off; see to it that you don't become frightened. Such things must happen, but the end is yet to come. For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world; all this is but the beginning of the 'birth-pains.' At that time you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death, and all peoples will hate you because of me."*

John 15:18-21: *"If the world hates you, understand that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would have loved its own. But because you do not belong to the world - on the contrary, I have picked you out of the world - therefore the world hates you. Remember what I*

told you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours too. But they will do all this to you on my account, because they don't know the One who sent me."

2 Timothy 3:12-13: *"And indeed, all who want to live a godly life united with the Messiah Yeshua will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves."*

So to summarize the points of this message:

- (1) We Are to Publicly Acknowledge Who Yeshua Is.
- (2) Publicly acknowledging Yeshua Enhances Our Life with God.
- (3) Publicly Acknowledging Yeshua Is a Component of Spiritual Warfare.
- (4) Our Reluctance or Refusal to Confess Yeshua Is Often Due to Fear of Consequences.
- (5) Yeshua calls us to risk marginalization and mistreatment in our identification with Him.

I can't think of a better way to end this message than to read the words of Peter as they are recorded in his letter to the Jews living in the Diaspora of his day:

1 Peter 4:12-19: *"Dear friends, don't regard as strange the fiery ordeal occurring among you to test you, as if something extraordinary were happening to you. Rather, to the extent that you share the fellowship of the Messiah's sufferings, rejoice; so that you will rejoice even more when his Sh'khinah is revealed. If you are being insulted because you bear the name of the Messiah, how blessed you are! For the Spirit of the Sh'khinah, that is, the Spirit of God, is resting on you! Let none of you suffer for being a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler in other people's affairs. But if anyone suffers for being Messianic, let him not be ashamed; but let him bring glory to God by the way he bears this name. For the time has come for the judgment to begin. It begins with the household of God; and if it starts with us, what will the outcome be for those who are disobeying God's Good News? - "If the righteous is barely delivered, where will the ungodly and sinful end up?" So let those who are suffering according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator by continuing to do what is good."*

One way we can continue to do what is good is to proclaim our faith in Messiah on every appropriate occasion, and leave the consequences to God.