
Unity



D Í V Í S Í O N

When to Unify and When to Divide

Erich Matthew Janzen

This article is the basis of a presentation made at the 2008 Unity Conference held at the Assembly of Yahweh in Cisco, Texas. It is my hopes that it will lead towards a greater understanding in the body of the Messiah on how we ought to grant brethren liberty in non-essential or non-salvation issues while at the same time insist on dividing with those people who break the bond or tie on essential, salvation issues. We must learn when to unify and when to divide. To unify with people on non-essential doctrine while ignoring essential doctrine is not honorable to Yahweh. To divide with people because of non-essential doctrine is also not honorable to the Most High. We must seek for a proper balance in this area, and in doing so let us always approach all issues in a spirit of love, gentleness, and reverence.

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I'm all for unity in the body of the Messiah. I'm all for unity in general. The thought of getting into an argument or a disagreement with a person turns my stomach all into knots. Honestly, I have many times in my life kept my mouth shut just for the sake of peace amidst a person or persons who I know would have disagreed strongly with the way I believed or felt. I believe there are many people like myself in the world today. I think many husbands seek to make their wife happy and often do so by trying their best to keep things comfortable for them around the home. I'm not saying that a man should allow his wife to rule over him in the family, but I'm just making a suggestion that husbands might consider the old saying, "If Mamma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!"

You know, we ought to be people who desire for unity with others. This means that we must genuinely consider the ideas, thoughts, suggestions, etc. of other people each and every day of our lives. If you're working together with someone and you've always done paper work "this way" and they make a suggestion to you about doing it "that way" it may rub you the "wrong way" for quite some time. What will it hurt though for you to take their suggestions into consideration? Who knows, you may find out that their "way" is indeed better than the way you've previously been doing things. Too often we allow pride to enter into these type scenarios and end up being stubborn and hard-headed.

One of my best friends has told me about His deceased Grandfather. This friend of mine is about 50 years old so His Grandfather lived in what us in our 20's call the "olden days." This Grandfather was so used to doing things the old fashioned way that he never quit using the outhouse for a bathroom. Even when his family placed an indoor bathroom in his home late in his life he refused to use this indoor bathroom saying something like, "I've used the outhouse all my life and I'm not stoppin' now." The good Lord never intended for people to use an indoor toilet in his mind.

I often seek for unity in dealing with my children and their relationship with each other. My wife and I are the proud parents of 5 children (currently number 5 is "on the way") and at times these children do not get along as well as we'd like. For those of you who have children this should not come as a shock. There are times when my youngest daughter (4) just doesn't want to play the same game as my oldest daughter (10). There are times when my sons get into an argument and all of a sudden I hear one of them fall on the floor. The next thing out of their mouth is either the word "Daddy!" or "Mommy!"

Six Reasons for Disunity

I wished that there could be more unity in all relationships of life, and this includes our spiritual relationship in the body of the Messiah. It seems that the older I get and more familiar I get with the Scriptures I see more and more places where differences of opinion and belief exist with well-meaning people. I've often met two believers in love with Yahweh's word who believe differently on a Scriptural subject. Those here at the conference have certainly experienced this as well.

One example we are all acquainted with is over the oft-debated subject of Yahweh's calendar. I've met some great brethren who believe the visual crescent is the new moon while other brethren believe that the conjunction determines the new moon. Same thing goes with the Passover; some eat on the 14th of Abib, others the 15th of Abib, both believing they are fulfilling the will of the Father on the matter. Then there's the issue of pronouncing the Sacred Name, and I'm not about to get into all the details of that in this article. Why does there exist such disunity among well-meaning believers in the body of the Messiah? I believe that there is not one patented answer to this question. Allow me to explain.

One reason I believe we have disunity in the body is because of honest and serious hearts. This may sound nonsensical to you, but I truly believe that honest and serious people can honestly and seriously disagree on a particular doctrine, even a doctrine of utmost importance. Both persons can study the Scriptures to come to a conclusion and end up with two different beliefs. The disagreement that exists between the two of them in this case, doesn't stem from anything outside of the fact that each one has diligently studied the subject and genuinely believes their position to be the accurate one.

On the other hand I believe we can have disunity because of a *lack* of studying Biblical subjects. Have you ever spent weeks or maybe months looking intently into an issue? After studying this long and hard about something you might then attempt to share your findings with another, but it just doesn't seem to sit well with them. The problem is you know that this other brother has not examined the topic as you have. This is not placing you on a higher pedestal than he; it is only recognizing the one who has studied the subject verses the one who has *yet* to study the subject. The "non-studier" has disunity with the "studier" not because he genuinely disagrees, but because he has not studied. It would do us well to consider the proverb about not answering a matter before we thoroughly hear it out (Proverb 18:13).

Now I'm not saying that we should never listen to anything the "non-studier" says, and this brings me to a third reason disunity exists. We always need to take mental notes on the perspective of others. We could call this seeking a multitude of counselors. Solomon spoke well when he said, "Where there is no guidance a nation falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety." (Proverb 11:14 NRSV) As we pursue a Biblical topic it never hurts to ask other brethren how they feel about it, and even make attempts to get them involved in the study with you. I can't tell you how many times I've thoroughly studied on a subject, but upon asking another brother (or sister) what he thinks about this or that, I encounter a completely different angle that I'd never seen before. I am so thankful for these "pieces to the puzzle."

I think sometimes we also get essentials and non-essentials mixed up. There are times when we want to divide with someone over a teaching that does not make a difference when it comes to our salvation or right standing with Yahweh. Paul speaks of these non-essential matters in Romans 14 and concludes that in these matters there is to be no despising from either side.

One issue Paul deals with in the aforementioned chapter is the drinking of alcoholic beverages. I realize that some people believe drinking one beer or one glass of wine will send you straight to the lake of fire, but this belief stems from a lack of study. The Bible does not prohibit the drinking of alcohol provided it is done in decency and moderation. Believers in the Messiah have the liberty to drink if they so choose. At the same time believers in the Messiah have the liberty to not drink if they so choose. Those who do not drink should not despise those who do, and those who do drink should not despise those who do not. I've seen just the opposite in churches I've been acquainted with in my life; both "camps" have people within them that despise the other side, but these things should not be. People need to recognize that whether you drink wine or don't drink wine has nothing to do with your salvation; it is rather an area of liberty in the Messiah.

Let me go "out on a limb here" and deal with this practically. I do not consider a disagreement on when the new moon is to be a matter of essentiality. Yes, I believe I'm right (chuckle) but that doesn't mean I believe my fellow brother in the Messiah is on his way to destruction. The same goes for the pronunciation of the Sacred Name. I believe an honest heart that seeks to call upon the name of the Father, even if that heart doesn't know the exact pronunciation, is doing the very best he or she can.

On the other hand I recently was involved in a discussion on the virgin birth. Some of you may have been at a previous Unity Conference where I spoke on this issue. If you were then you know that I believe it is an *essential* issue in Scripture seeing that it is inextricably tied to the doctrine of the Son of Yahweh. When Gabriel answered Miriam's question in Luke 1:34 (How

shall this be seeing I know not a man?) he did so by telling her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Highest would overshadow her, and *for that reason* (NASB) the holy one would be called the Son of Elohim (Luke 1:35). It doesn't take much study to find out that the doctrine of the Son of Yahweh is essential. John 3 tells us that he that has the Son has life, but he that does not have the Son does not have life; the wrath of Yahweh abides upon him.

Here's another reason for disunity. Sometimes we do not give people time to grow in grace and knowledge. I've been following Yahweh in studying the Scriptures for over 11 years now and I can tell you with surety that how I live now is not how I lived 10 years ago. There are doctrines I believe now that I didn't even know existed back then! Yahweh has been so gracious to me in not placing everything on me at once. He's given me time to grow into a mature believer. We need to be willing to give people the same opportunity. Recognize that you always didn't wear tassels, or you used to have a problem with loving your wife like the Messiah loved the assembly. That beard wasn't always there on your face, and you used to covet everything you saw. People do not become perfected saints overnight. I do not speak here of the imputed righteousness and atonement of the Messiah on our behalf, but rather on our becoming set-apart by obedience to the law of Yahweh. Give people time to grow, this will help unify.

Yet another reason we have disunity stems from pride and stubbornness. Yes, sometimes we as human beings do not like the idea of giving up our previously held beliefs. We do not like to admit that we are in error on doctrine, but I ask you, who is it hurting? A good friend and fellow brother of mine has said before that if you are exercising, doing pushups or something, and you cheat by doing 50 instead of the "required 75" you aren't hurting anybody but yourself. It's definitely not hurting the friend that you lie to when you tell him you did 75 pushups. You're fooling yourself, and the same thing goes for when we do not admit to erroneous doctrine or belief.

I've given six basic reasons why I feel there exists disunity among believers in the Bible and I'm sure many of you can think of more, but if we want to come to unity we are going to have to at least acknowledge these basic reasons and all make active plans to correct our spiritual lives in the most pertinent places. It is so pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity, and believe you me I've been in some very unpleasant places of disunity. Beginning to apply these six reasons to our minds will at the very least give us a "jump-start" at unity in the body of the Messiah. The next time you experience disunity in the body of the Messiah go through each of these reasons, being completely honest with yourself, asking which (if any) is the reason for the current disunity. Here are the six reasons in summary:

1. Honest and serious students of Scripture can at times believe differently.
2. Lack of study.
3. Isolation rather than seeking a multitude of counselors.
4. Not recognizing the difference between non-essentials and essentials.
5. Not allowing people ample time to grow in the faith.
6. Pride and stubbornness in not admitting error.

Looking Intently at Division

At the same time we need to understand that we should not seek for unity at the cost of essential doctrines of Scripture. We can come to places in our life where we have a deep heart felt emotion for a person, but the person can be badly mistaken in their doctrine. Of course we should always consider this persons perspective, but there does come a time when we have to take a stand because we know that their belief is incorrect and at times can jeopardize their salvation. Some doctrines deny the essential teachings or themes found in sacred Scripture. We cannot allow unity to exist with people who are not following the primary teachings of Scripture.

Let me give an example to make it practical. I believe we all here would consider the belief in a Creator to be an essential doctrine of Scripture. The fool says in his heart there is no Mighty One (Psalm 14:1). You may have a co-worker that just refuses to believe such but is still a very nice individual. They may be kind to everyone they meet, and may always offer you a helping hand. I certainly believe that we ought to be kind to them, help them, and show forth the life of Messiah not just with our words in witnessing to them, but with our actions, our deeds. Nevertheless we cannot compromise our belief in a Creator if it means staying in friendship with this person. There may come a time when we have to choose between our spiritual belief and our human friendship. I hope that you will know the correct answer to such a dilemma. We cannot sacrifice truth on the altar of friendship. The right hand of fellowship cannot exist between two opinions that have such a wide chasm existing between them.

I've witnessed to a lot of professing Christians, and upon doing so I often hear words like, "Well your religion is very exclusive," or "If what you say is true, there is not going to be many people in heaven." Whenever I hear remarks as such I try to quickly point out to them that they have an exclusive religion as well, that is, if they *really* believe the book they claim to believe in. I always point them to John 14:6 where Yeshua states that He is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one can come to the Father but by Him. That sounds pretty exclusive to me. Oftentimes these people I converse with do not really understand that they are exclusivists. I ask them if they believe Yeshua's words in John 14 and you would be surprised at the answers I receive. While the answer is usually "yes" it is most of the time given in a quiet, unsure vocal tone.

The fact is this: if you really believe the Bible then you have to be an exclusivist. You have to be able to say that anyone who makes an attempt to have salvation outside of Yeshua will fall short. In other words, there is absolutely no salvation outside of Yeshua the Messiah according to John 14:6. This places atheists, Jews, Muslims, and a host of other people outside the realm of salvation.

We have a choice; we can either sacrifice truth on the altar of being unequally yoked together with unbelievers, or we can sacrifice our friendships on the altar of truth. Remember, I'm not saying that we cannot be friendly to all people we meet, but this should not lead to having a friendship with someone while completely disregarding huge differences of belief. I sometimes go to a Kosher Chinese restaurant where an orthodox Jewish Rabbi oversees everything that goes on. I'm very friendly to him when talking, but he has asked me about my beliefs and this meant that I had to tell him. In these cases, we should not downplay our differences. We do not have to be rude about our exclusive beliefs, but we should not be embarrassed about them. Yeshua tells us that if we are ashamed of Him before men, He will be ashamed of us (Mark 8:38).

What I'm attempting to get across in this short booklet is that while we must seek for unity we have to recognize that everyone is not going to be unified. Everyone is not going to make it to the kingdom. There are going to be many people lost forever. Matthew 7:21-23 tells us of people who will go all the way up until judgment believing that they had salvation, yet they will hear the words "Depart from me, I never knew you." Wouldn't it be utterly amazing to really believe you had salvation for let's say 50 years, and then find out that even though you thought you were saved you never really were? Yeshua never really knew you.

While there *is* unity in the body of the Messiah, we must understand that the body of the Messiah is not necessarily everyone that attends the assembly regularly or from time to time. The visible church is not always *the* body of the Messiah. There are tares among the wheat, sheep among the goats. There are people who leave the truth because they never really were of the truth (1 John 2:19). We must realize that the Apostle Paul did write about unity in Ephesians 4, but he also wrote about there being disunity in the assembly in 1 Corinthians 11:19. Here Paul uses the Greek word *hairesis* (literally meaning disunion) and says that there must be divisions among you. However, the reason that heresies arise in the assembly is so that those who are approved might be made manifest. An untruth pops up in the assembly and discussion begins. The more

discussion takes place the more the “cream comes to the top” and the truth can be found in a more sure fashion. The approved are revealed and likewise the false are known in due time.

However, sometimes what happens is that a “new” doctrine comes into an assembly and it really *is* the truth. The problem in this case though is that it is looked upon as error, and if the majority doesn’t see it you can forget it. Many times an established church or organization can be more loyal to what they’ve always believed and taught than they are to Holy Scripture. Pastors and Elders should be very careful about these things. We need to recognize that Yahweh can reveal truth not just to “Pastors and Elders” but also to the students in the assembly. Even David stated in the Psalms that he knew more than the ancients and the elders because he kept the precepts of Yahweh and meditated on Yahweh’s commandments (Psalm 119:99-100).

I’m reminded of the time when the name of our heavenly Father was made known to me. I made an attempt to bring it to the Pastors of the church I attended. I was just a young man at the time (listen to me, I’m only 27 now) so it was difficult for me to get anything across to men over twice my age. In spite of this I did want to express my concern to the Pastors that our church was not calling upon the name of Yahweh (Joel 2:32). You know what I was told? I was causing confusing or division in the church. Do I think that this was true? You better believe I do. I was definitely causing division in the church, but you see there are good divisions and bad divisions. While the Bible does say we are to mark those which cause division amongst us (Romans 16:17) it also speaks of Yeshua causing division with His teachings (John 7:41-43; John 10:6-19). The passage in Romans then must be speaking of *false* doctrine and not *true* doctrine. The Pastors that I spoke with at that time acknowledged that the Father’s name is Yahweh therefore the doctrine I was bringing was not false and this means the division I was causing did not fit under Romans 16 even in *their* belief system. What was really happening was this: I was causing division in the *church system*. The church did not *want* to use the name Yahweh, and therefore anyone who pressed the issue was looked down upon.

What I am saying is that those of us here at this conference who Minister, Pastor, Elder, etc. a flock of people need to be careful when dealing with people who are seemingly causing division. We do not want to find ourselves fighting the truth, but at the same time we do not want to find ourselves accepting error. If a member in the assembly approaches us with a serious issue, then we need to consider it with all of our heart, and this means that all the people in the assembly should consider it, not just one man. One man theology is very cultic; one man theology is not a multitude of counselors.

Sometimes we are just going to have to accept that division is what is going to have to take place. Look at Yeshua’s words in Luke 12:51-53: “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. (KJV)”

The parallel account of this passage in Matthew has Yeshua saying that He came not to bring peace, but rather a sword (Matthew 10:34-39). The sword here obviously symbolizes division and sharp and strong division at that. As it states in Matthew 25:32-33, Yeshua will divide the sheep from the goats on judgment day. There will be a division that takes place; the “sheep” will have eternal life, and the “goats” will have eternal destruction (also see Luke 6:22; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Exodus 8:23).

What shall we say to these things? Well, many times division can be a bad thing, in stirring up discord among brethren by gossip (Proverb 6:14-19), in spreading false doctrine amongst people (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10), and in just seeking to cause division and strife (1 Corinthians 3:3). We should instead do our very best to always seek for unity in the body of the Messiah. It seems that so many people are just looking for ways to be divided with others and these things

ought not to be. Brethren should “go the extra mile” in seeking to restore true brotherly unity in the assembly. With that being said we must also understand that we cannot compromise the essential truths of the faith for an outward *appearance* of unity. To unify with someone while neglecting doctrines such as the existence of the Creator (and sole worship to one individual Creator, Yahweh), the Messiah and Son-ship of Yeshua, or the obedience to the commandments of Yahweh is not honoring to Yahweh. No doubt we can maintain a friendly spirit amidst people that do not hold to such doctrines, but we should not unify ourselves with such doctrines that are clearly contradictory to the inspired Scriptures.