



THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

The Messiah's Call to Unity

by Matt German

Our Messiah – on the eve of His brutal scourging and death on the tree – did a strange thing. He prayed. Now that in itself isn't strange, for even a cursory reading of the Gospels will reveal that Yahshua had a committed prayer life. No, what was strange was what He prayed. At the conclusion of the Passover meal, still in the presence of His disciples, He petitioned the Father with these words:

John 17:20-22 “Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as We are one.”

Yahshua could have prayed about many things at this critical moment, but He chose to pray for unity among all those who would believe in Him. And in three verses, He made that petition three times. That in itself ought to tell us how important unity is to Him ... and to the One Who sent Him. Yet we would be hard-pressed to say that that kind of unity is present in the overall Body of Messiah today. Why?

While there are a number of reasons, I believe that the overarching cause can be expressed accurately in a single phrase that the Father laid on my heart three or four years ago: “the spirit of offense.” What is the spirit of offense? First, it is a spirit, not merely a work of the flesh or a carnal reaction to a situation or person. Second, it is a spirit which causes offense to take root between believers. As we survey the Body of Messiah in general, its effects seem evident: a Body that is disaffected, disconnected, disengaged, disillusioned, dismembered, dislocated, discouraged, and discombobulated (confused and upset). The net result? A weak, emaciated Body having no where near the impact that it should.

We actually shouldn't be that surprised at the current state of things. Yahshua prophesied that offenses (occasions of stumbling) would come and that this would be a key sign of the end-times (Matt. 24:10). However, just because Yahshua

prophesied it doesn't mean that we should just passively accept it as inevitable. It's obviously not His desire for His ekklesia, otherwise He wouldn't have wasted His breath praying for unity among His people.

The spirit of offense is a spiritual enemy. But on a practical level, what actually causes offense? Ironically, one of the greatest causes of offense is the Truth. People – even those of His own hometown – were constantly finding offense with Yahshua because He represented truth that they couldn't receive (see Matt. 14:54-58, for example).

Psalm 119:165 “Great peace have they that love Your law (*torah* - law, teachings, instruction), and nothing shall offend them.”

If we have a sincere love for the *torah*, the truth of Yahweh's Word, then we will have great peace and nothing will be able to offend us. The converse is also true: if we don't have a sincere love for the truth, we won't have great peace and we will be susceptible to offense. So, in order to inoculate ourselves against the spirit of offense, we must examine our own hearts and ensure that we have a genuine love for the truth. That means allowing the Spirit of truth to break down our own preconceptions and religious notions.

Yahshua said that we must abide in Him if we are to bear fruit. He went on to say that if we bear fruit, the Father would prune us so that we might bear more fruit and that He would send the Comforter (John 15:1-5, 26). Then He said, “These things have I spoken to you, that you should not be offended.” (John 16:1).

As mature believers, it is important for us to recognize that the Father will prune us, and pruning is rarely pleasant for the one being pruned. But if we're abiding in Yahshua, then the Spirit will provide comfort and counsel during the pruning process. We also need to recognize that the Father's pruning will often come through the hands of an anointed man. If we fail to recognize this, then when the pruning occurs we will be tempted to take offense.

The defeated one – Satan – has a variety of weapons available to him. Why does he chose such a small, simple thing as ‘offense’ as a primary weapon of choice against the Body? Probably because it does seem to be so innocuous – small, mild, bland – yet it can do such catastrophic damage to relationships. Ultimately it wounds the Body of Messiah, rendering it ineffectual, and tarnishes our witness for Him. Recall:

John 17:21 “...even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You,

that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that You sent Me."

Make no mistake – the degree to which we demonstrate true unity in Messiah is the degree to which the world will believe that Yahweh sent Yahshua ... and, by extension, that Yahshua sent us.

Obviously, unity among believers is important to Yahweh and to Yahshua. How important is it to us? Though opportunities for offense (occasions of stumbling) will surely come, we need not accept the invitation to take offense. Let us resolve today to give no place to the devil. Let us give no place to the spirit of offense.

What Is the Ekklesia?

There's a lot of talk in Christian circles about "the church" - what it is, what it isn't, what it should be, what it shouldn't be. Many people think of it either as a building or a particular denomination, but what is the Biblical definition of "the church"?

The word translated as 'church' in the New Testament (NT) is the Greek 'ekklesia' (eh-cleh-SEE-uh), which the Spirit-Filled Life Bible defines this way:

"church, ecclesia: used in secular Greek for an assembly of citizens and in the Septuagint for the congregation of Israel. The NT uses the word in the former sense in Acts 19:32, 39, 41, and in the latter sense in 7:38 and Hebr. 2:12. The dominant use in the NT is to describe an assembly or company of Christians in the following ways:

1. the whole body of Christians;
2. a local church constituting a company of Christians gathering for worship, sharing, & teaching;
3. churches in a district"

Strong's Concordance defines the ekklesia as "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly". So the word literally means an "assembly of 'called-out' ones". It is not a physical building, nor is it a particular denomination. In fact, the word 'denomination' derives from the Latin *denominationem* (nom. *denominatio*) which, ironically, means "a calling by anything other than the proper name".

When Yahshua asked His disciples who they said He was, Peter responded that He was "the Messiah, the son of Elohim (eh-low-HEEM, 'God')" (Matt. 16:13-16). Yahshua answered by saying, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and

blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father Who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter (*Petros* - a small rock), and on this Rock (*Petra* - a boulder or massive rock) I will build my assembly (ekklesia, 'church'), and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." (v17-18)

Yahshua wasn't saying that He would build His ekklesia on Peter but rather on the revelation which he had just voiced, that Yahshua was the Messiah and the Son of Elohim. That was and is the only foundation upon which He will build His assembly - the revelation of Who He is as both the Anointed One and the Son of Yahweh.

Where does the word 'church' come from? According to the dictionary, it derives from the "Old English *cirice*, ultimately from Medieval Greek *kurikon*, from Late Greek *kuriakon* (doma), the Lord's (house), neuter of Greek *kuriakos*, of the lord, from kurios, lord;". However, it's interesting to note that in classical Greek mythology, Circe was "the enchantress represented by Homer as turning the companions of Odysseus into swine by means of a magic drink."

The epistles, particularly those of Paul, contain great insights into how the local assembly is (and is not) supposed to function. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he observed "when you come together as an assembly (ekklesia), I hear there are divisions (*schismata* – schisms) among you" and went on to ask "do you despise (disdain, think little of) the assembly (ekklesia) of Yahweh?" (1 Cor. 11:18, 22).

When we allow schisms or divisions within the local assembly, we're actually showing disdain for it - that which Yahshua Himself loved and for which He gave Himself (see Eph.5:25-29). Sadly, these types of problems often occur because some people come to see the local ekklesia as a spiritual orphanage or "halfway house", rather than the glorious manifestation of His presence that it is supposed to be.

Eph. 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of Elohim, ²⁰ being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Messiah Yahshua Himself being the chief cornerstone; ²¹ in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Master; ²² in whom you also are built together for a habitation of Yahweh in the Spirit."

Regardless of its origins, the word 'church' does not adequately represent the true meaning of 'ekklesia'. The ekklesia is:

1. the Body of Messiah, the habitation of Yahweh through the Spirit
2. being built by Yahshua on the revelation of Him as Messiah

and the Son of Yahweh
3. the "pillar and ground of the truth"

Each Believer, born of the Spirit, is an integral part of the general assembly and Ekklesia of the firstborn, which are written in heaven. A person does not join the "church"; rather, each person who truly believes in Yahshua is baptized into the Ekklesia – the Body of Messiah – by the Holy Spirit. Then, together, we are to grow into a "holy temple in the Master."

May each of us receive a greater revelation of that reality!

Seedtime and Harvest

Gen. 8:22 "While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

Yahweh has put in place in the earth an enduring principle of sowing and reaping. Though most clearly seen in the sowing of physical seed and the reaping of the resulting crops, the principle is not limited by type. The same principle of seedtime and harvest applies to every part of our lives: relationships, prayer, finances, and even spiritual growth (the "seed" of the Spirit is sown in us at conversion, but we are on a lifelong journey, bearing fruit as we grow into the stature and fullness of Messiah).

Sadly, many believers don't really understand this principle – that there is a seedtime AND a harvest time. The two times are not the same; you don't reap as soon as you sow. Anyone who has ever planted seed for a garden recognizes the (sometimes frustrating) reality of that statement.

Throughout their history the ancient Israelites demonstrated the same lack of understanding of this principle. Because Yahweh is longsuffering and didn't immediately judge them for their disobedience and rebellion, they made the mistake of assuming that He must not really have been that concerned with it. They assumed they had somehow "gotten away with it", and that led them to walk even further outside of His will. This process continued for many years, until they finally reached a point where Yahweh had had enough. Because they didn't understand seedtime and harvest, however, when judgment came they didn't understand it for what it was. They couldn't connect the judgment they were reaping with the seeds of disobedience that they'd been sowing for years.

It also works the other way. We can consistently sow good seed, but if we don't reap a harvest according to our timetable, sometimes we can become weary, disenchanted, disheartened, and make the fatal mistake of ceasing to sow. The Apostle Paul addressed this tendency in his letter to the

Galatians:

Gal. 6:9 "Let us not be weary in doing good, for we will reap in due season, if we don't give up."

There is a due season, an appointed time. But if we lose heart and quit, we will fail to reap the promised harvest. Any farmer knows this – if he doesn't continue to sow, he may eat today but he surely won't eat next year.

Beyond the simple act of sowing faithfully, we must also ensure that it is good seed that we're sowing. We must examine it closely. Then we must ensure that we're sowing it into good ground, because even good seed, when sown into corrupt soil, will yield a corrupted harvest.

Don't grow weary in your sowing. Recognize that there is an appointed time for harvest, and it will surely come!

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