



A Challenging Word: What To Do with Those Who Behave Badly?

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In what is a welcome development to me, and us here at Set Apart Ministries, several well-known American Messianic teachers are speaking out about their concerns about the poor behavior and contentiousness all too common among American Messianic believers today. Some have spoken of these things with the hopes of educating people to the problem. I have just heard of one who used a large dose of “tongue in cheek” humor to get the message across! While I agree with the concerns, I am not certain that calling them out in a large convention context is the best approach for resolution. I will discuss my reasoning for this a bit later. The bottom line is that it is my understanding that these identified inappropriate behaviors are not causative but rather the outcome of an underlying common issue. There is a deeper foundational issue, and a secondary one, that need to be more clearly addressed for us all to experience more frequent YHWH honoring resolutions instead of the chaos and fragmentation that has been common to fellowship groups.

This is plain talk that can be unpopular because the topics are personally challenging! For those who understand something of the deepest reaches of our own selves, how often we fail at being like Messiah, and seeing how much our Father has been patient with us, such challenging thoughts are welcome despite their difficulty! We have often spoken here of the difference between “hurt” and “harm.” (Something may hurt but be helpful, as in surgery, and something may harm but be enjoyable as in overindulging in anything.)As Messiah observed, we do need to take the plank out of our own eyes before we can assist anyone else. This is an area of study and practical application for us here at SAM for these past thirteen years now. My observations here may seem rather blunt, but I am thinking that it is past time to mosey around the bush. Please prayerfully consider and hear me out! As you read on, know that you are one who is willing to consider things that might be personally stretching and know that our SAM community here prays for you! Whether in a leadership position, a member of a fellowship, or even as one who has yet to find fellowship, we look to our Redeemer for strength to pursue and endure as we strive to grow into a likeness of Him!

SURFACE SOLUTION

Just a few years ago, there was also a brief spate of attention to this issue given by various leaders in the American Messianic movement. To quickly summarize it, I might say that the recognition of how much trouble people were finding in their fellowship relationships led to the recommendation that people should go under the leadership of either a traditional Christian church or a synagogue and forgo an independent home fellowship or group. I can see that this might “impose” some order and structure that is missing, but there is a basic problem here. How could anyone who honors Messiah Yeshua and walks in His moedim put themselves under the headship of someone who does not? How could someone who has accepted Yeshua put themselves under the headship of someone who does not? Even if the relationship is cordial, the underlying differences would make it impossible to be in genuine unity and actually submitted to the leadership. (I wrote about this concern in several articles in the Messy Expectations series to be found on our site.) I’m afraid that this solution was rather like putting a brace over a broken bone without setting it. While it may bring some external structure and order over the behavior it would create its own set of problems, much as it did in the first century. In my opinion, this proposal also missed the mark of addressing foundational causes.

PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE

Those in the Messianic movement have spoken often of the marriage covenant relationship we are to have with our Messiah. Rightly so! I heartily agree this is appropriate; however, it seems we have put the proverbial cart in front of the horse for those who have not first dealt with first things. Another prominent Scriptural metaphor is that of a Father and His children, very closely coupled with a Shepherd tending His sheep. We know that much in the natural realm is a picture of a spiritual truth. The parent/child nature of a relationship precedes a future marital relationship in the natural realm. Just as a Father/parent nurtures his children toward maturity, so does a Shepherd do the same for his sheep. I see a dual picture here of both the parental aspect of our relationship with our Elohim and the eventual goal of a marriage relationship with Him through Messiah Yeshua, our Great Shepherd.

As A.W. Tozer observed that the bird of truth has two wings, so do I think we must acknowledge both aspects here. Running ahead to deal only with our future marriage relationship without tending to the necessary learning of childhood leaves one ill prepared for that relationship. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, gave warning of this concern in several places. Among them is the following.

Pro 1:8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

Pro 1:9 For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

To properly understand and walk in the instruction of the father, which I understand to be Torah, we need to **submit to and retain** our mother’s instructions because they are foundational for our father’s instruction. Both need to work together to accomplish our YHWH’s plan. A word study of this picture was the result of one of our teleconference discussions. We have found it quite enlightening. I encourage others to do likewise, or look for the study in our SAM materials online. The ornament and chains are far more functional than simply decorative pictures.

It is generally understood that the ‘law of the mother’ has to do with character development which leads to personal maturity. Relational maturity is also an outgrowth of our mother’s teachings often humorously referred to as the need to “play nice!”

I believe that the underlying root issue of these inappropriate behaviors is a lack of personal and corporate maturity because we have all too often forsaken—or never received—the law of our mothers. As a result, there is a lack of personal character for many people today, and often they are not even aware there is a problem. I do not say this lightly! Having been a clinical marriage and family therapist for most of my adult life, I have seen a cross section of people from many economic and faith backgrounds. As I became more clearly known and identified as a Christian therapist, I saw more of the dysfunction typical to our traditional church systems. As I became aware of and entered into a Torah pursuant lifestyle and equipping community, I have seen the unique stresses and strains that personal character issues bring to this walk. **It is not the issue of community life that is the problem. It is that so many people who try community life are not prepared to do it well.** As difficult as it is, there is reason for hope, but also many reasons for caution and discretion in how we proceed!

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

A quote from the famous UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden, was brought to my attention recently. He apparently understood the importance of a good foundation of personal character!

“While you, the leader, can teach many things, character is not taught easily to adults who arrive at your desk lacking it. Be cautious about taking on reclamation projects regardless of the talent they may possess. Have the courage to make character count among the qualities you seek in others.”

Character development is necessary and best accomplished during our childhood years. But what to do when that hasn’t happened? As Mr. Wooden pointed out, it is not easily taught to adults. I have seen this to be true both in my professional clinical background as well as in my roles as Life Coach and Undershepherd. Even those of sincere desire to serve Messiah can struggle greatly with lack of character in themselves. If we didn’t have confidence in Messiah’s ability to actually put something into us that wasn’t there before, we could easily lose hope and fall into despair. Thankfully, we know He can transform us through the renewing of our mind, will and emotion...when we are willing to let Him, and His Spirit through others, challenge us.

Just as was likely evident during the years of slavery before the Exodus, there has been much destruction of family relationships and roles in our day. It has been difficult for several generations now to have had adequate instruction in the law of our mothers. The concept of an intact family with clear boundaries and authority has also been dissolving under a concerted attack by those outside of a Biblical faith who have other agendas. Personal and family issues of poor training or structure can lead to both personal and corporate immaturity in fellowships later. I have a whole series of articles on this matter that I call [“Messy Expectations”](#) since poor communication skills about what each one **thinks** should happen plays right into this matter.

This is a hard but sad truth that many people find personally threatening to comprehend. People in leadership roles, in traditional Christian circles as well as Messianic ones, who have not themselves submitted to and retained the character development teaching of their mothers, have been a part of harmful experiences for those under their leadership to the point that many people are “twice shy” and fearful of and unwilling to receive guidance. It is also true that many people in our Messianic fellowships have a strong independent streak, having had enough stamina to come out of the more socially acceptable churches. Unfortunately, most come out in an emotionally wounded state, now compounding community dysfunction over any personal or family dysfunction. If they only understood that identifying and resolving these personal immaturities would make further struggles less divisive perhaps there would be more openness and willingness to learn, rather than fear of exposure.

WHO HAS GENUINE AUTHORITY?

I would also add that there is a great deal of confusion, fear and animosity in Messianic circles over just what constitutes genuine authority. My efforts to simply learn about how several well-known Messianic leaders view the basis for their authority for leadership were met with hostility and suspicion except for two people who saw the need to discuss the matter. (Results are presented in an article on [Calling, Anointing or Ordination? Under Whose Authority Do You Lead?](#) on our site.) Conversely then, people in leadership who **are** equipped and attempt to come alongside their people in the shepherding process are often misinterpreted, maligned and rejected. As a result, some who have attempted to shepherd have given up. A well respected national Messianic leader has observed to me that the degree of immaturity is so high that our *“iron sharpening iron too often looks like a brawl with lead pipes.”*

FIRST THINGS FIRST

I see a desire to increase personal knowledge of the Word far outrunning the companion need to obtain that learning within a framework of Torah pursuant relationships much like a family; with clear boundaries, authority lines, a clear identity and long term commitment. (By this I mean, Our Father’s teachings being sought without the light of our mother’s teachings as boundaries.) These should be the ornaments and chains, like a bridle on a horse, that direct our behaviors and our learning. Since our YHWH is relational in and of Himself and the Son demonstrates His relational submission to His Father’s will and since He is our Shepherd and model, I believe we would do well to do likewise. **Knowledge alone puffs up and often fails to truly edify.** A leader who expounds on such subjects to large audiences with whom there is no relationship may bring some recognition to issues, but the hard daily work of entering into our part of growing in maturity I think can only be accomplished through committed relationships with YHWH honoring people we can trust to speak into our lives. A conference often brings an emotional release and recognition, but more often than not, that realization quickly fades and does not become operational in daily life.

Though we can see the poor outcomes of such behaviors and can identify them, my experience is that to simply tell people that they need to behave differently is often ineffective at best and harmful at worst. If they **could** behave differently they would likely do so but all too often, personal immaturity leaves them far too emotionally centered to be able to think before they speak/act in the heat of

circumstances. Nor is every person equally able to clearly hear and interpret the *Ruach* or the Word on their own since there are varying degrees of personal maturity present; thus, Yeshua's concurrence of concern for people harried and helpless without a shepherd. (*Numbers 27:17; Matthew 9:36*)

The result is that just identifying the bad behavior and telling people to behave differently can end up coming across as a scolding to do better, a performance based expectation. (By this, I mean that people comply out of fear of disapproval from others rather than from a genuine heart motivation.) It is also true that these are often very familiar words for many and they will then feel the guilt or shame as they may have done previously in dysfunctional parent/child relationships. The same guilt or shame may also cause them to aggressively refuse it. Many find it easier to shoot the messenger than to consider the message.

If we were really able to simply "straighten up and fly right" in our own human effort alone, we would not really need a Messiah. It is only through the indwelling Presence of the *Ruach haKodesh* and the iron sharpening iron process that we are being transformed, not by the gritting of our teeth and hanging on by our fingernails trying to act right. For example, as the late Dallas Willard observed, it is not so much a question of learning to act in a more merciful way as it is the need for us to become more merciful people, as we grow up into Messiah our Head. It is the internalization of our belief, **when faith comes**, that results in our spiritual formation and growth, not just behaviors imposed from outside. God's part and our part. This can also be characterized as a motivation in the Spirit of the Law, rather than the legalistic interpretation of simply doing the right things. If we have acknowledged our need for a Messiah and received Him, then we need to do our part and cooperate with Him and those He places in committed Torah pursuant relationship with us in order for the Yah honoring iron sharpening iron process to be effective. This is especially true for those adults who have never genuinely received the teachings of our mothers in areas of character development; exactly where it is most difficult for adults to acknowledge their need.

SUPERFICIAL ECHAD

Another aspect of this vulnerability leading to division is the enforcement of what I call "superficial echad." When people are encouraged to just "act as if" they get along with people, I see the danger of deep rifts in relationship that are simply covered over with a degree of social grace. Such rifts are like fault lines that will not endure stress. The differences that are all too familiar: "Should we use the "J" word or not?" "You're kidding! You count the Omer that way?" "So you think that is acceptable behavior for Shabbat?" If we struggle with these things now, how will we do with the great tribulation we are facing? Mike Clayton, of *Joined to HaShem* Ministries has been fond of observing, "As we train, so will we perform." If there is any truth we can count on, it is that the adversary of our souls will do whatever it takes to increase pressure on these fault lines that people think are hidden. I think it is this matter that may have a lot to do with apparently "sudden" broken fellowships. I have experienced great destruction when someone "hides in the weeds" rather than honestly bringing out their concerns. These concerns may or may not be valid but that won't be known until they see light.

These issues relate to what modern terminology calls passive aggressive behavior and what I think Scripture identifies as a lack of honesty with deceit. (I am writing on this topic separately as well.) All too often, people harbor unspoken beliefs or sentiments or emotions while appearing to be agreeable on the surface. A person I correspond with who has many years of experience in Messianic Fellowships had this to say:

The "passive/aggressive" attitudes/personalities are a problem, as you pointed out...everyone doing/saying with they know to be correct/scriptural, but under pressure acting out where they really are in their personal growth in Yeshua. There must a "safe/affection" for people to be able to calmly share how they feel about things without them being pressed down until there is acting out. I think this a major in Community. People are confronted to do things that they really aren't able to for one reason or another, but fearing a situation if they decline, take it on and become angry about it. A lot of nodding/smiling and under it all resentment.

My questions when a fellowship experiences upheaval would include asking each person to personally evaluate when they themselves had a grievance or concern which they did not bring up to be resolved? I would ask; what about their fellowship would either encourage or prevent them from bringing such things out? Mutual accountability with one another before our Messiah in plural leadership is a Scriptural way to proceed. This would also include mutual accountability between leaders and members. This is very emotionally challenging for all and few seem willing to seriously take it to heart to actually do it. Another correspondent with 20+ years of experience in various Messianic fellowship groups recently sadly observed much along this line, from which I am drawing a few key points:

I think that I have needed to be so much wiser in the manner I interact with fellow Sabbath keepers. I have found myself in a spiritual "mine-field" by naively attempting to suggest something of the authority of Yehovah within an assembly. I falsely assumed that we were all on the same page. ...

I think that a shepherd needs to verify just how connected to the Head those who gather really are. I have erred in assuming a greater level of spiritual maturity than what really exists. ...

The whole process is counter to the politically and religiously correct culture in which we live. I know for myself that this has been really hard, and I've concluded that this is just too much for most to endure. The practice of playing church is the only "acceptable" alternative.

Did you catch the sadness and struggle represented in these words? No longer is the matter one of pointing fingers at anyone else, but more of coming to grips with the very real, personal and deep issues each one of us must face, if we are going to allow Messiah to make us over in His image. It is a growing experience that hurts, but does not bring harm! Just as Moshe was left in "the back side of the desert" for many years before his call was fully activated, so may we experience a death of self, a stripping of self, before we are fit vessels for His service. It can feel like death so it is often fought against, rather than trusting the Potter with our clay. If we settle for a facsimile of His presence in our lives, as this observer concluded, we may simply settle for an **appearance** of spiritual maturity rather than endure the process. Dear reader, have you also experienced something like this? Please come join the conversation on these matters, either by correspondence or phone, or by joining our teleconference discussion groups. Your input is needed!

SECONDARY FOUNDATIONAL ISSUE: Spiritual Warfare

The secondary issue is the lack of awareness of most Messianic believers and leaders of the reality of spiritual warfare. For many years, I hesitated to write boldly about these matters thinking that only those called to deal with the most spiritually or ritually traumatized people needed in-depth information. I have in recent years revised that opinion. The enemy of our souls has become far more bold and intrusive. I have personally seen indication of people who have yet to recover from their spiritual/ritual trauma in many Messianic fellowship groups. It is generally unrecognized by the leadership as far as I know. We have experienced this kind of infiltration repeatedly over thirteen years in our community. This should not be surprising since our foundation was specifically to develop community to help in the restoration process of those coming out of satanic ritual abuse. This spiritual danger of infiltration of fellowship groups by people who are knowingly or unknowingly being manipulated by the evil one is widespread yet rarely acknowledged or effectively addressed. (Our PowerPoint presentation on “The Importance of Echad in Messianic Community” is a sort of spiritual warfare primer and has been well received at presentations. I am still awaiting an opportunity to record it for online presentation.)

Of course, not everyone involved has welcomed the darkness being brought out into the light and the retribution that results isn’t always easy to deal with either. This is a very complex subject and does not lend itself to any quick summary so I will stop here. Suffice it to say that I still believe there is a powerful spiritual difference between a new group that forms as a result of a blessing and “sending out” from another group vs. one that forms as a result of a “falling out.” The second type will have fault lines in the very foundation of the fellowship that will leave them more open for spiritual assault and division in relationships. Bad seed cannot produce good fruit.

None of these concerns are new. Sha’ul wrote of them quite thoroughly. This becomes very evident when word studies are done of the list of concerns he has provided. I will address this more fully in the companion article I am also working on now, dealing with what is currently called passive aggressive behavior. I see it VERY closely connected to these concerns. I will provide Romans 1:28-31 here with the Strong’s numbers from the [Blue Letter Bible](#) for the readers ease of reference. Please DO look them up! Pay special attention to the highlighted ones: debate, deceit and malignity.

And ²⁵³² even as ²⁵³¹ they did ¹³⁸¹ ~~0~~ not ³⁷⁵⁶ like ¹³⁸¹ to retain ²¹⁹² God ²³¹⁶ in ¹⁷²² [their] knowledge ¹⁹²², God ²³¹⁶ gave ³⁸⁶⁰ ~~0~~ them ⁸⁴⁶ over ³⁸⁶⁰ to ¹⁵¹⁹ a reprobate ⁹⁶ mind ³⁵⁶³, to do ⁴¹⁶⁰ those things which are ²⁵²⁰ ~~0~~ ³³⁶¹ convenient ²⁵²⁰ ;

*Being filled with ⁴¹³⁷ all ³⁹⁵⁶ unrighteousness ⁹³, fornication ⁴²⁰², wickedness ⁴¹⁸⁹, covetousness ⁴¹²⁴, maliciousness ²⁵⁴⁹; full ³³²⁴ of envy ⁵³⁵⁵, murder ⁵⁴⁰⁸, **debate** ²⁰⁵⁴, **deceit** ¹³⁸⁸, **malignity** ²⁵⁵⁰; whisperers ⁵⁵⁸⁸, Backbiters ²⁶³⁷, haters of God ²³¹⁹, despiteful ⁵¹⁹⁷, proud ⁵²⁴⁴, boasters ²¹³, inventors ²¹⁸² of evil things ²⁵⁵⁶, disobedient ⁵⁴⁵ to parents ¹¹¹⁸,*

Without understanding ⁸⁰¹, covenant breakers ⁸⁰², without natural affection ⁷⁹⁴, implacable ⁷⁸⁶, unmerciful ⁴¹⁵.

Sadly, all too often we find that Isaiah's and Yeshua's words remain true:

Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, Isaiah 29:13

"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with [their] lips, But their heart is far from Me. Matthew 15:7-8

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion then, I agree with many concerns expressed about the poor behavior all too common among Messianic believers today. I suggest that the best opportunity to resolve these concerns is not so much in the "describing of them" as it is in going back to the basics of "Mama's Torah" and character development within the local community before we move too far along the road of preparation as Messiah's Bride! In my opinion and experience a local community effort to deal with the foundational sources of these contentious behaviors on a more consistent basis through relationship will be more effective than simply identifying them, much as a stream of water directed at the base of a fire is far more effective than the same water being directed at the top of the flame.

How one goes about doing that is a much larger topic and has been the foundation of much of what I have learned and taught most of my adult life and especially in these past 13 years. It involves a willing humble heart and motivation to understand and apply our mother's teachings, even if we have left childhood behind long ago. Growing older is not enough. It involves personal and corporate commitment, and people being willing to examine just what maturity looks like and how it behaves, identifying attained maturity for fellowship members and leaders as well as establishing identity, boundaries and authority within which the iron sharpening iron process can proceed. It requires much awareness of the evil one's schemes and the spiritual maturity to recognize and address warfare matters in any kind of effective way. Knowing ourselves and our personal and corporate vulnerabilities is part of our equipping to be able to effectively stand in the full armor of our *Elohim*.

INVITATION

In the course of considering these difficult topics, it became clear that I am to offer some training in ways to provide the character development that is so needed. This training would be appropriate for those who are responsible for others as well as for those who are looking inside themselves.

I am putting together a 6 week session group training based on the material in my "Clues for Shepherds" PowerPoint. It will include the six areas addressed, offer some optional reading assignments and a weekly hour long teleconference with opportunity for Q & A discussion of each topic. I believe that a

follow up group session will also be forthcoming, using “The Importance of Echad for Messianic Communities” PowerPoint as a study guide.

Several people I correspond with have already expressed interest, but there is room for a few more participants. It is still in the planning stages, but hopefully will begin in July, and likely be scheduled at 5:00pm CDT on a weeknight. Recordings will be available should a participant be unable to attend the live discussion. In order to keep the number of participants small, several groups may be scheduled.

YHWH willing, perhaps this training will become a recurring event!

No special computer knowledge is needed in order to participate...just your phone!

Please contact me soon at Barbara@christian-transitions.com if you'd like to participate in this powerful opportunity to sharpen your skills! Whether you are or have been a fellowship leader or are considering doing so, what you learn will make a positive difference!

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