

Righteous Judgment In Community

containing:

The Foundation of Righteous Judgment
The Selection of Righteous Judges
The Application of Righteous Judgment
Judge Not

by
Dean & Susan Wheelock

Do not judge according to appearance,
But judge with righteous judgment.
John 7:24

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~ Introduction ~

For the LORD will not cast off His people,
Nor will He forsake His inheritance.
But judgment will return to righteousness,
And all the upright in heart will follow it.
Psalms 94:14-15



One of the most problematic areas to be found today in the Messianic Movement concerns the method which fellowships should use when making judicial decisions concerning individual members. Too often, a single member (or only a few members) set themselves up as investigator, prosecutor, jury, and judge over matters of dispute -- especially when it comes to "correct doctrine" -- rather than submit to an official body of elders.

There seems to be an inherent need within the hearts of men causing a desire to want others to think and act in the exact same manner as themselves, even to the point of excluding from fellowship those who disagree on doctrinal matters. Needless to say, this attitude causes untold frustration and dissension, leading to arguments and even heartbreak when carried to extreme. Such attitudes were the foster parents which led to the dark ages of the Inquisition -- when men and women were tortured and murdered because they held to alternative doctrinal beliefs from that of the all powerful Church.

Even though there is no "all powerful" church or organization which controls the Messianic Movement today, there are, nevertheless, many individuals (and small groups

under strong leaders) who wish to exercise that same degree of control over their Brethren in the Faith.

This booklet addresses some of the issues involved in attempting to establish Righteous Judgment within local Messianic fellowships and communities. It is our belief that Righteous Judgment -- as defined by the *Torah* -- must first be learned and successfully practiced in the family unit and then applied at the local level. Once a proper model has been established and is functioning well, the principles learned can then be taught and applied on a more widespread basis. Of course, complete Righteous Judgment will not be found on earth until it comes in the Kingdom of God under the rule of the Messiah *Y'shua*:

**"People shall be brought down,
Each man shall be humbled,
And the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled.
16 But the LORD [YHVH] of hosts shall be exalted
in judgment,
And God who is holy shall be hallowed in
righteousness.
17 Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture,
And in the waste places of the fat ones strangers
shall eat."**
(Isaiah 5:15-17)

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom, 2015

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~ The Foundation ~ ~ Of Righteous Judgment ~

And what great nation *is there*
That has *such* statutes and righteous judgments
As are in all this law which I set before you this day?
Deuteronomy 4:8

During the past 6000 years mankind has attempted various types of self government. Some forms of government (such as Communism, Fascism, Absolute Monarchy, etc.) have been quite problematic, while others have met with a certain degree of success.

Today the preferred form of government is representative democracy (democracy = "rule by the people"), which some believe is a panacea for the world's ills. Democracy is not the perfect form of government. Nevertheless, it seems to be the best current form of government for those societies who know how to use it properly. Winston Churchill is reported to have said:

"Democracy is a poor form of government. Nevertheless, it is the best man has been able to come up with."

The Greek philosopher Plato had this to say about democracy:

"... a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike."

The bottom line is that all of mankind's forms of government have fatal flaws. The chief flaw can be found in a single word ... injustice.

~ Injustice ~

One of the major problems found in all forms of government has been the inability to establish courts which consistently render Righteous Judgment. This should not be surprising, since major disagreements exist within the different cultures as to what actually constitutes right and wrong.

For example, take the issue of a hungry man stealing food in order to survive. In some of the more fundamentalist Muslim countries, such an action could result in the cutting off of the thief's hand, leaving him maimed for life. However, in some "primitive" cultures, where food is hunted and gathered in common, a hungry man is entitled to a portion of the community's food stores. In those cultures, taking food when one is hungry is considered a right, not a crime.

Some time back, we heard what was purported to be the true story of a US citizen (still living) who was imprisoned for over 20 years for breaking into a house and stealing food during the Great Depression of the 1930's. (It was stated that he could have been given a life sentence because of a previous brush with the law.) In our opinion, such a severe sentence for

stealing food should be classified as "cruel and unusual punishment."

The Book of *Proverbs* has this to say about a starving man stealing food:

"People do not despise a thief

If he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving.

³¹ Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold;

He may have to give up all the substance of his house.

(Prov. 6:30-31)

The mere fact that a man is compelled to steal in order to eat may be indicative of a greater societal problem, for it may reveal the unwillingness of that society to help those who are hungry and in need:

"If you extend your soul to the hungry

And satisfy the afflicted soul,

Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,

And your darkness shall be as the noonday."

(Isa. 58:10)

Nevertheless, the Scriptures teach that if a man is able to work and refuses to do so, then he is not to be fed by the community, lest others see his example and decide they too will go on the dole:

"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."

(II Thess. 3:10)

Today, every large city in America (and most smaller ones as well) have segments of the population who do not have an adequate amount of food. Many of these people are also homeless. You might ask; Are these people willing and able to work? Some are, some are not. Yet, it is an indictment of modern society that such a condition could exist in a country which is supposed to be the richest that ever existed on earth. What is the solution to these types of problems? Apparently, from what we see, mankind does not currently have a solution.

We believe problems such as this can only be resolved when society enacts righteous laws based upon the *Written Torah* and then applies them in a fair and equitable manner.

~ Community Government ~

The same problems which beset national, state, county, and local governments also exist in small voluntary communities which have banded together because of some shared belief or cause. These voluntary communities (where a group of people live together in close fellowship) are usually (but not always) religion based. For the purpose of our study, we will be looking at the foundational basis for the establishment of a Messianic Community consisting of Believers in *Y'shua HaMashiach*.

Religious Communities can be established on any one of a variety of governmental structures. It is not unusual to find a Religious Community run as an Absolute Monarchy, with one person ruling over the entire Community; making, interpreting, and executing the rules.

Other Communities might be established under more democratic principles, where everyone has an equal voice and a vote about matters which pertain to the Community at large.

Still others might be run along the lines of a Republic, where certain individuals are elected (or chosen in some other manner) to represent the people and to rule the Community.

The purpose here is not to recommend a particular type of government for a Messianic Community. That decision must come from the Community itself. Our purpose is to establish the origin of the Bedrock standards by which all Messianic Communities must adhere. If that Bedrock Standard is established in Righteousness, the Messianic Community will be equipped to make good decisions on the details.

~ An Early Example ~

The New Testament gives an example of an early Messianic Community which was established under communal guidelines, somewhat like the modern Israeli *Kibbutz* (where everything is held in common) or *Moshav* (where members are allowed to retain their individual property while living and sharing together in close proximity):

"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus [Y'shua]. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

"³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

(Acts 4:32-37)

Apparently, *Joses* received a certain amount of recognition for what he had done for the Community and another couple desired that same kind of recognition. However, they did not deal honestly with the Community about their real intentions:

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. ² And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.' ⁵ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. ⁶ And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.

"⁷ Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter answered her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?' She said, 'Yes, for so much.' ⁹ Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried

your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.' ¹⁰ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. ¹¹ So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things."
(Acts 5:1-11)

It is obvious that God was very active in this Messianic Community and that He wanted people to be honest and forthright with each other and with Him.

~ The Source of Law ~

There can be only two basic sources from which a society's laws and judgments originate. Laws come either from the law giving Creator God who made all things (*The Tree of Life*), or they are derived through the intellectual faculties of men (*The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*).

As best we know, laws in the ancient world were primarily derived from the rules which were established by the men who controlled those societies. One of those early lawgivers was the despot Nimrod; the post Flood founder of *Babel* and other city states. It is entirely possible that some of the world's modern laws date clear back to his kingdom:

"Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. ... ¹⁰ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, ¹² and Resen between Nineveh and Calah..."
(Gen. 10:8, 10-12)

Today, all modern nations are under the rule of manmade laws. This fact accounts for the many differences to be found in the laws of various societies. It is a generally accepted axiom that most laws are written to favor the rich and powerful. If this is true, it would help explain why so many of the world's people live in abject poverty.

~ Natural Law ~

While it is our belief that most of the laws (in both the ancient and modern world) have been written in order to give control to the rich and powerful, there also seems to be commonalities among the various systems of law which are just and good. For instance, most ancient societies had laws against stealing and murder. Many also had laws against adultery, although that prohibition was not universal. (Even today there are different opinions as to what constitutes adultery.) The existence of these commonalities eventually became known as Natural Law. Sometimes the rulers of a society try to cover the fact that many of their laws were written by and for the powerful people. By claiming that their laws were derived from Natural Law, they justify their injustice in their own eyes.

The proponents of the Natural Law theory believe that a legal order exists in the universe resulting from nature itself. For this reason they believe the precepts of Natural Law are universal and can be discovered through human reason, which is (they contend) also a result of nature. Thus, proponents claim that all cultures and societies are capable of deriving Natural Law through their natural human reasoning power.

They say that if all the world's cultures would apply their reasoning powers to discovering Natural Law, then all the nations of the world could come into general law conformity and there would be peace on earth.

In modern times Natural Law has been extended to include certain "inalienable rights" which claim equality for all men. However, the principle of equality before the Law did not come from some imagined Natural Law, it came from the Law of God:

"One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD (YHWH). ¹⁶ One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you." (Num. 15:15-16)

Thus we see, that some of what passes for Natural Law is really Law that is a mixture of God's Law and laws developed through man's own reasoning. This is not to suggest that all Natural Law is bad, for many precepts found in Natural Law are beneficial to society. It is merely to say that Natural Law is yet another mixture and that it contains both good and evil, just like the "Tree" from which it is derived.

~ Modern Natural Law ~

The common source of most modern manmade laws, as found in Western Civilization, are ancient Greece and Rome. Greece and Rome did not claim that their law code came from God, but, rather, that it was developed through the use of reason and logic, and was, therefore, Natural Law. One of Rome's major proponents of Natural Law was the philosopher Cicero, who said that Natural Law was universal and could be discovered only through human reasoning. In the Greek and Roman systems, right and wrong were determined by intelligent men making rational decisions (or so they would have us believe).

Natural Law evolved in the late 1600's when the English philosopher John Locke began to emphasize Natural Rights, which he believed were inherent within Natural Law. Locke taught that governmental authority came only from the consent of the people, although this concept had certainly not been a byproduct of Natural Law prior to his time.

Locke believed that because society needed to have rules (so that anarchy would not result) people would come to agree to live under a common government. However, this did not mean that government had the right to take away the people's "Natural Rights," rather, the government was supposed to protect those "rights of nature" or "rights of man." This idea may have been good in theory, but it did not always work in application.

Locke's teachings did find fertile ground in Western Europe and the Americas, for they were instrumental in the development of the English Bill of Rights (1689), the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), and the United States Bill of Rights (1791).

Today, many scholars reject the Natural Law and Natural Rights teachings, perhaps because they think it smacks too much of Divine origin and they want to believe that man is

master of his own destiny. In fact, most legal scholars now believe that all laws are created by the people in power primarily for their own benefit.

~ One World Government ~

As we observe the governments of our modern societies and the World's mad rush towards Globalization, we see that the "little people" are being increasingly subjected to the desires of the rich and powerful. Some see this as a giant conspiracy led by a group of evil men and women bent on taking over complete control of the world. We see it more as the natural outgrowth of the inherent greed of mankind, coupled with the "shrinking" of the world through modern transportation and instant communication.

There is a conspiracy, but that conspiracy is a very ancient spiritual conspiracy, masterminded by the one who wanted to take control of the earth from the very beginning. He is none other than *Lucifer* הִילָל (#1966 Hay-layl' = *Lucifer*) or *Ha Satan* הַשָּׂטָן (#7854 Hah Sah-tahn' = the Adversary):

"How you are fallen from heaven,

O Lucifer, son of the morning!

How you are cut down to the ground,

You who weakened the nations!

¹³ **For you have said in your heart:**

"I will ascend into heaven,

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;

I will also sit on the mount of the congregation

On the farthest sides of the north;

¹⁴ ***I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,***

***I will be like the Most High.*"** (Isa. 14:12-14)

To aid him in his wicked plan to take over control of both earth and heaven, *Lucifer* enlisted the cooperation of the fallen angels along with thousands (if not millions) of unwitting human dupes who wish to further his agenda of bringing the entire world under a manmade universal government. *HaSatan* has deceived these men and women so that he can disconnect them from God. Many of them believe, with all their heart, that a one-world government established by man is the only way to achieve world peace. Their plans, like that of their spiritual leader, will have a certain degree of success in the beginning, but in the end they are doomed to failure:

"Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,

To the lowest depths of the Pit."

(Isa. 14:15)

Isaiah's prophecy closely parallels one found in the book of Revelation:

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ² He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³ and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished."

(Rev. 20:1-3)

During the thousand years that follow this event, Messiah *Y'shua* will rule the earth with Righteous Judgment:

**"Let the rivers clap *their* hands;
Let the hills be joyful together before the
LORD (YHVH),
9 For He is coming to judge the earth.
With righteousness He shall judge the world,
And the peoples with equity."** (Psalm 98:8-9)

~ God's Law for Mankind ~

The same Creator God who designed the physical laws of nature also designed human behavioral laws, along with the laws by which nations are to be governed. These governmental laws, if followed, have the capability of bringing peace among the nations without sacrificing the rights of anyone. Meanwhile, the human behavioral laws, if followed, will bring peace at the individual and Community level, as people learn how to properly relate to one another. These behavioral laws are what must be accepted and in place if there is ever to be a successful "Messianic Community."

If one accepts that true law comes from the Creator God, then it must be decided which religion (Buddhism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) actually speaks for God. In our view, one can discount those religions which claim multiple gods (such as Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.) and go in favor of monotheism; for if there were many gods, then a choice would have to be made as to which one of those many gods was the actual lawgiver. Since pagan gods were often said to be in conflict with each other, it would be impossible to determine which one truly had the authority to establish universal law. This is not the case in a monotheistic religion where there is no question about which god prevails, because there is only One God.

Among the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) the first two have common origins in the God of *Avraham* אַבְרָהָם (Av-rah-ham' #85), *Yitzchak* יִצְחָק (Yeet-sock' #3327), and *Ya'acov* יַעֲקֹב (Ya ah-cove' #3290) = (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The codification of the Law (*Torah*) is acknowledged to have taken place during the time of *Moshe* מֹשֶׁה (Mow'-shaw #4872 = Moses). Hebraic Christianity takes the *Torah* one step further by teaching that *Y'shua* came to "complete" the law (*Torah*) by teaching its proper application:

"Let there be no thought that I have come to put an end to the law or the prophets. I have not come for destruction, but to make complete." (Matt. 5:17 BBE)

The Apostle Paul also upheld the validity of the law (*Torah*):

"Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." (Rom. 3:31)

Meanwhile, Islam is a latecomer (7th century CE) that does not recognize the primacy of the God (YHVH) of Judaism and Christianity, but insists on worshipping a god they call *Allah*. Despite the best efforts of ecumenical theologians, who say that Islam worships the same God as the Jews and the Christians, one need only look at the god of the *Koran* (a god of hate) versus the God of the Scriptures (a God of love) to

determine they are not the same. For the Messianic Believer, basic law comes from only one source -- YHVH, the God found in the Holy Scriptures:

**"For the LORD [YHVH] is our Judge,
The LORD (YHVH) is our Lawgiver,
The LORD (YHVH) is our King;
He will save us; ..."** (Isa. 33:22)

That YHVH is our Lawgiver was confirmed by *Y'shua's* brother *Ya'acov* (Jacob or James):

"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy." (James 4:12)

Any discussion of Righteous Judgment in the Messianic Community must use Scripture as the basis for study. Meanwhile, those who live outside of *Torah* will be judged outside of *Torah*:

**"For as many as have sinned without law (*Torah*) will also perish without law (*Torah*), and as many as have sinned in the law (*Torah*) will be judged by the law (*Torah*)
13 (for not the hearers of the law (*Torah*) are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law (*Torah*) will be justified; ..."** (Rom. 2:12-13)

To go outside of the Scriptures merely introduces the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* (via human reasoning) into the mix.

~ The Differences ~

What then are the differences between manmade laws and the Law of God? As already pointed out, the primary difference is the origin of the law. Man's law originates out of the reasoning, intellect, and heart of man for the benefit of those in power. God's Law originates from the Giver of Life for the benefit of all mankind:

**"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD's (YHVH's) house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And peoples shall flow to it.
2 Many nations shall come and say,
'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the
LORD (YHVH),
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths.'
For out of Zion the law shall go forth,
And the word of the LORD (YHVH) from Jerusalem."**

(Micah 4:1-2)

At this time, it is man's law which prevails throughout the earth. This is why there is so much disagreement among the nations and why wars are continually being fought somewhere on earth.

Even though all modern law is manmade, that does not mean the laws of all nations are created equal. Some nations have actually allowed portions of God's Law to influence their manmade laws. It is our opinion that as a result, those nations

have received a blessing proportionate to the amount of God's Law found in their nation's legal code. Likewise, when a nation begins to reject the precepts in their legal code which are based upon God's Law, that nation will then see a reduction in their blessings:

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD [YHVH] your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD [YHVH] your God will set you high above all nations of the earth." (Deut. 28:1)

Many Americans believe that the United States Constitution was based wholly upon God's Law. It is true that the Scriptures did influence the writing of the Constitution, however, there was much Greek and Roman influence in the creation of that document as well. The laws of our nation are a mixture of good and evil, and as more and more of God's "good laws" are abandoned, the United States finds itself with less and less of God's blessings bestowed upon it.

~ A Righteous Kingdom ~

Scripture records a brief period of time when a nation actually did follow the Laws of God. That was during the reign of King David of Israel:

"So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people." (II Sam. 8:15)

It was for this very reason that God chose the children of Israel and established them as a nation. They were given the divine responsibility of setting the example of how to exercise Righteous Government and Righteous Judgment in the Land as an example to the other nations of the earth:

"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD (YHVH) my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. ⁶ Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD [YHVH] our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? ⁸ And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:5-8)

Sadly, this condition of Righteous Judgment did not continue long enough for it to "catch on" among the Gentile nations, for during the reign of King Solomon, David's son, evil began to creep back in at the highest level of society:

"For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD (YHVH) his God, as was the heart of his father David. ⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶ Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD (YHVH), and did not fully follow the LORD (YHVH), as did his father David." (I Kings 11:4-6)

As Israel's leaders began to further depart from God's Law, so did the people. Thus, when God's Law began to take a back seat, Israel's blessings began to diminish.

~ Judah the Lawgiver? ~

Some translations make it sound as though there is another "lawgiver" (other than God) who was to come from the tribe of Judah. For example, in the *New King James Version* both Psalm 60:7 and Psalm 108:8 say the following:

**"Gilead is Mine, and Manasseh is Mine;
Ephraim also is the helmet for My head;
Judah is My lawgiver."** (Psalm 60:7)

However, some translations render the Hebrew word *chakak* ("lawgiver" in the NKJV) as "scepter":

**"Gilead and Manasseh would be mine,
Ephraim my chief stronghold, Judah my scepter, ..."** (Psalm 60:9 TNK)

(Note the difference in verse numbering between the NKJV and the Jewish *Tanakh*.)

Scepter denotes kingship. The tribe of Judah was designated by God as the tribe from which the royal line would come. King David and his descendants through Solomon (including *Y'shua* the Messiah) were from the tribe of Judah. The charge to the kings was to enforce God's Law (the *Written Torah*). However, it is true that because of his position, a king was allowed to make decrees which were binding on the general population during his reign. This would be especially true in the area of taxation, for national governments do need a source of revenue. Also the king could call young men into a standing army if necessary. Thus, on a lower level, the king could make temporary laws. However, the king's laws (or decrees) were not supposed to contradict, in any way, the *Torah* laws given by God, nor would they be permanent throughout the ages as is the Law of God.

~ The Role of the Judge ~

Several years ago, those of us living in the United States heard a lot about the role which Judges should or should not play in our government. This intellectual chatter was the result of two US Supreme Court vacancies. On one side of this debate were those who believe that Supreme Court Judges should adhere strictly to the Constitution as originally written. This type of judge is known as a "strict constructionist." They object to Judges who render decisions which amount to creating new legislation from the "bench."

On the other hand there are those who believe that the Constitution is merely a guideline which is open to interpretation when making judicial decisions. These folks are sometimes called "loose constructionists," although they prefer to call their judicial style a form of "active liberty."

Given the fact that our laws are manmade (they originate from a legislative body of human "lawmakers"), and it is the responsibility of the judiciary to interpret the laws in a fair and equitable manner, it is our opinion that the "strict constructionist" approach is the proper one. If a new law needs

to be enacted, it is the responsibility of the Congress or the state legislature to decide on the matter, not the judiciary.

~ The Eternal Law ~

God does not change. Therefore, His Law is eternal and it is not open for Judicial revision as new situations arise:

"For I am the LORD (YHVH),

I do not change;

Therefore you are not consumed,

O sons of Jacob." (Mal. 3:6)

However, God's Law does require that Judges render righteous decisions based upon a very small number of basic laws. At most, God has only given us 613 commands in the *Torah*. In contrast, man's laws seem to multiply faster than rabbits. After over 200 years of existence, the number of federal laws in the United States must be in the range of hundreds of thousands. Because there are only 613 commandments in the *Torah* (the first five books of the Old Testament -- Genesis through Deuteronomy), the Judges of ancient Israel were required to interpret the examples found in the *Torah* code in such a way that it could cover every conceivable situation.

For example, there are very few *Torah* commands which deal with the laws of personal liability. However, from those few commands all of the myriad possibilities concerning liability law have to be derived; not just for the ancient times but even down through the centuries into modern times. In other words, the principles of liability law found in the *Torah* can also be applied successfully in our modern world. Therefore, it was the responsibility of Israel's Judges to make righteous decisions based upon *Torah* principles. (For more detailed information on this subject please see the articles in the booklets *Torah Concepts I & II*)

In America, a Judge who is a "loose constructionist" is usually one who tends to "liberalize" the law, thereby making the law less strict. However, the general practice in Judaism was to make the *Torah* commands even more strict. Hence, we find the famous "fences around the law" that are to be found in abundance in Pharisaic Judaism. This too can lead to misuse, as manmade rule is piled upon manmade rule. *Y'shua* had some things to say about the rule bound religion of the *Pharisees*:

"For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." (Matt. 23:4)

Heavy burdens do not come from Righteous Judgments, they come from man's judgments:

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30)

~ Evil Judgments ~

History is full of examples of Judges making wicked decisions based upon personal favoritism towards one party, or as the result of a bribe. An individual law may be right and

good, but if it is wrongly applied it can be evil and oppressive. Sadly enough, Scripture records examples of the misuse of God's Divine Law as well. The end result of these unjust Judges was the captivity of God's people and the destruction of Jerusalem:

"Now hear this,

You heads of the house of Jacob

And rulers of the house of Israel,

Who abhor justice

And pervert all equity,

¹⁰ Who build up Zion with bloodshed

And Jerusalem with iniquity:

¹¹ Her heads judge for a bribe,

Her priests teach for pay,

And her prophets divine for money.

Yet they lean on the LORD (YHVH), and say,

'Is not the LORD (YHVH) among us?

No harm can come upon us.'

¹² Therefore because of you

Zion shall be plowed like a field,

Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins,

And the mountain of the temple

Like the bare hills of the forest." (Micah 3:9-12)

~ Righteous Judgments ~

Thankfully, God is not like men. Even though He becomes angry with His people, His anger does not fester forever, for He is willing to forgive His people if they will truly repent:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Not only will God forgive iniquity, He has promised to one day restore Righteous Judgment:

"Therefore the Lord says,

The LORD (YHVH) of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel,

...

²⁶ I will restore your judges as at the first,

And your counselors as at the beginning.

Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.'

²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed with justice,

And her penitents with righteousness."

(Isa. 1:24, 26-27)

This was apparently what happened, at least in part, during the time of king Jehoshaphat:

"So Jehoshaphat ... set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, ⁶ and said to the judges, 'Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD (YHVH), who is with you in the judgment. ⁷ Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD (YHVH) be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the LORD (YHVH) our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes.'" (II Chron. 19:4-7)

This is what the world needs today, Judges who will judge "not for man but for the LORD."

~ Summary ~

The same principles which have been discussed in this chapter concerning how adherence to the Law of God effects nations, also apply to the governments of states, counties, municipalities, and especially to the rules governing Messianic Communities.

All governments today operate under manmade laws which are primarily the result of human reason, despite the fact that some claim their laws are derived from Natural Law. Some of those manmade laws do have their basis in God's Law, and adherence to those God given laws does provide a source of blessing to society as long as they are observed.

When the laws of a nation are manmade, it is our opinion that Judges should observe a "strict" interpretation of the law, since it is the responsibility of the legislative branch to enact new laws when necessary. However, in ancient Israel, the Judges were required to "interpret" the law in a broader fashion since only 613 basic laws were given and many of those pertained to worship at the Tabernacle. For this reason, it was imperative that Israel have Judges who were filled with the Knowledge of the *Written Torah*, and the Wisdom needed to apply it in a Righteous manner. They needed to make decisions that were both just and tempered with mercy.

These same principles also apply to Messianic Communities. Messianic leaders must be experts in the correct application of *Torah* Law. Above all, they must be beyond reproach in their dealings with the members of the Messianic Community.

If any Community (large or small) is to truly come under God's Law, rather than having a legislative body composed of men, the role of the Judges will become extremely important. For under such circumstances they will be required to interpret the intent of the basic laws given in the *Torah*.

The day is coming when the world will have Righteous Judges. This will not happen in the *Olam Haze* *הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה* (Oh-lahm' Hah-zay' = this present world), but it will occur in the *Malchut Shamayim* *מְלָכוּת שָׁמַיִם* (Mah-hoot' (#4438) Shah-my'-eem (#8064) = the Kingdom of Heaven), when *Y'shua HaMashiach* returns to establish God's One World Government on this earth. Because *Y'shua* will judge with perfect equity, His throne will be established forever:

**"The king who judges the poor with truth,
His throne will be established forever."** (Prov. 29:14)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ The Selection of ~
~ Righteous Judges ~

"I can of Myself do nothing.
As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous,
Because I do not seek My own will
But the will of the Father who sent Me."
John 5:30

Righteous Judgment requires Righteous Judges. A nation or community may have developed righteous laws, but unless those laws are administered in a righteous manner the end result is still unrighteousness.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the first prerequisite in the establishment of a Community is to develop a righteous set of rules. The basis for the rules, in our opinion, must rest upon the *Written Torah*, the Law of God, as amplified by the Prophets, Writings, and the *Brit Chadasha* (Breet Hah-dah-shah' = the Greek or New Testament Scriptures).

Since a newly forming Messianic Community has the foundational basis for its Community Rules established by the Scriptures and lived sinlessly by *Y'shua*, the next task it faces is deciding how to decide. Before a Community can begin to function, groundwork must be laid which specifies exactly who is going to be responsible for developing the *Halacha** and the methods for making decisions and judgments once the Community is functioning.

Those aspects will be addressed in the following chapter: *The Application of Righteous Judgment*. The purpose of this chapter is to examine what character and personality traits the community members should look for when selecting their leaders, and to address some possible methods for their selection.

~ Appropriate Leaders ~

When it comes to determining how the selection of leaders should proceed, *Moshe* had it easy, for he was personally chosen by God to lead the children of Israel. Directly assisting *Moshe* was his brother *Aharon* *אַהֲרֹן* (#175 Ah' hah-rone' = Aaron), who was also selected by God. So, when it came to the children of Israel, the real leader was God Himself:

**"You [YHVH] led Your people like a flock
By the hand of Moses and Aaron."** (Psalm 77:20)

Some individuals take to themselves sole authoritarian rule over a congregation or "church" -- claiming they are merely emulating the "Wilderness Government" of the children of Israel. However, while *Moshe* was definitely the final human

* Hah'-lah-khah = the application of the rules, or the way the members of the Community are to walk so they can live in unity within the law.

authority, he had many able assistants. These included, first of all, the ability to go directly to God for answers. However, *Moshe* was also ably assisted by his brother *Aharon*, the system of Judges (as established in Gen. 18), and the specially selected Seventy Elders:

"So the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. ¹⁷ Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.'"

(Num. 11:16-17)

In this particular case, there was no escaping the duty these men had been given to serve in this prototype of what later became known as the *Great Sanhedrin*. Tradition states that six men were selected from each of the twelve tribes, making a total of 72. That meant two of the tribes would be one representative short, since only seventy were to make the final cut. The Scriptures are silent as to how the Tribes selected their two man representatives.

Two men, *Eldad* אֶלְדָּד (#419 - Ehl'-dahd) and *Medad* מֵדָד (#4312 - May'-dahd) did not think themselves worthy of the honor. They did not want to be embarrassed by not making the final selection, so they did not heed *Moshe's* call to gather at the Tabernacle. Yet, when the Spirit fell on the seventy selected men, *Eldad* and *Medad* were included, even though they were still in the camp:

"But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp."

(Num. 11:26)

It is clear, from this story, that when God calls a person to a task he is called! However, on the other hand, there are also those who claim a calling who have not been called. This was the case with *Korah* קֹרַח (#7141 - Koh'-rahk):

"Now Korah ... with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; ²and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. ³ They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD [YHVH] is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD [YHVH]?'"

(Num. 16:1-3)

The final resolution of this revolution was clear, for the answer as to who should lead the children of Israel came directly from God:

"And he [*Moshe*] spoke to the congregation, saying, 'Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins.'

"²⁷ So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children. ²⁸ And Moses said: 'By this you shall know that the LORD [YHVH] has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. ²⁹ If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD [YHVH] has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the LORD [YHVH] creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD [YHVH].'

"³¹ Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. ³³ So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly."

(Num. 16:26-33)

Today it is not as easy to find out who is called by God to lead a Messianic Community, for even though some may aspire to leadership -- who are not yet ready for the responsibility -- it does not mean they are necessarily in rebellion. The important thing for the Messianic Community to remember is that the final decision, as to who should lead a group, rests upon God. It is the responsibility of the Community to discern His will.

~ Establishing Community Rules ~

Many years ago Dean was involved in the establishment of a set of Rules and Procedures for a newly forming congregation. This was not a formal community where people lived together in close proximity, it was a typical church congregation located in a major metropolitan area. Actually, some of the members traveled long distances to fellowship in this group.

At the time, this congregation was loosely associated with a Sabbath keeping organization which was involved in evangelistic work through the media. The congregation had an ordained Minister who was responsible for conducting the services and looking after the spiritual needs of the flock.

Because of past associations in authoritarian organizations, many of the people attending wanted to make sure they would never again find themselves in an hierarchic church where all they were supposed to do was "pray and pay." Thus, there was strong support for some type of congregational approach to "church government."

Twelve people were selected by secret ballot of the congregation. If memory serves correctly, each member who wished to vote was asked to write down the names of twelve people (men or women) who they thought should serve on a committee to write the Rules and Procedures for the congregation.

The final document was far from perfect. However, considering the fact that it was developed by people who had no previous experience in the development of church government, the outcome was, in the final analysis, quite good.

The Rules and Procedures were then put forth to the entire congregation, which voted (again by secret ballot) to accept them. The congregation also voted to remain affiliated with the Evangelistic Association rather than becoming independent. The Rules and Procedures of that church congregation survived (with some modification) for about twenty-five years before it was abandoned.

At the time of its development, this congregation was not fully in tune with all the aspects of keeping the Law of God (*Written Torah*), however, they were committed to allowing Scriptural direction, both in their personal lives as well as the running of the Church. All in all, it was a valuable experience for those who participated in the project.

~ Selecting Leaders ~

There are a number of ways in which leaders can be selected. In the Rules and Procedures document mentioned above, the method used was a typically American one -- secret ballot. However, in the ancient Synagogue of *Y'shua's* day, voting was not the preferred method of selecting leaders. Instead, new leaders were selected by the existing leadership. In the case of replacing Judas as part of the Twelve Apostles, the casting of lots was used:

"Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus [*Y'shua*]; ¹⁷ for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry. ... ²⁰ For it is written in the book of Psalms:

**""Let his dwelling place be desolate,
And let no one live in it;"** [Psalm 69:26(25)]

and,

"Let another take his office." [Psalm 109:8]

"²¹ Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*] went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.'

"²³ And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.' ²⁶ And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

(Acts 1:16-17, 20-26)

Please note that before the lots were cast, two men were selected by the eleven remaining Apostles. How they first chose the two men, Barsabas and Matthias, is not stated. Also, it is sometimes argued that the Apostles actually voted by placing different colored lots in each candidates basket. The one receiving the most lots of the affirmative color was chosen.

Yet another enigmatic passage, in the book of *Acts*, speaks about selecting seven men to serve as "Deacons:"

"Now in those days, when *the number of the disciples was multiplying*, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'

"⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them." (Acts 6:1-6)

There are a few points in this passage which need to be emphasized:

- ◆ These men were initially selected to serve the physical needs of the congregation. (v. 3)
- ◆ The "multitude" (i.e. the entire congregation) was asked to make the selection of a specific number of men (seven). How this selection was made is not known. (v. 3)
- ◆ They had to have certain high qualifications: "a good reputation," "full of the Holy Spirit," and "full of wisdom." (v. 3)
- ◆ The Apostles apparently had the right to confirm or deny the men, who had been chosen by the congregation. (v. 6)
- ◆ The men chosen received an "ordination" through the laying on of hands. (v. 6)

Later on, some of these same men who had been "ordained" as "Deacons," became powerful preachers of the Good News:

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ [*Messiah*] to them. ⁶ And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." (Acts 8:5-6)

Some Messianic Communities seem to function quite successfully by having one single person in charge. However, this type of Community government is only successful when that person is totally dedicated to God's Word and to the welfare of the people. The advantage to this type of government is lack of dissension, since usually all of the members must either toe the line or leave. The disadvantage is the danger that members can grow to revere the single leader too much. This can result in "Elder" worship.

In our opinion, the dangers of single leader rule far outweigh its advantages. We believe it is far better to allow disagreement within a group so that issues which are troubling members can be made known and hopefully resolved, rather than ignored.

~ Ordaining Elders ~

The term "Elder" comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*, and it can refer both to an "older" person (to whom respect should be shown) or to one who holds the position of "Elder" (no matter what his age) in the *Ekklesia*. The *Ekklesia* is the congregation of Messianic Believers or, as most people today would call it, "the church."

New Testament Scripture seems to confirm the synagogue tradition that the "Elders" of the *Ekklesia* were not elected by popular vote of the congregation, but by other "Elders" who already held that office or function:

"So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." (Acts 14:23)

It was the practice of the Ancient Synagogue for each congregation to have a *Beit Din* בית דין (Bayt - #1004, Deen - #1777 = House of Judgment) composed of three or more "Elders." These "Elders" would, in turn, ordain other "Elders" as the need arose. This might occur when an "Elder" in a congregation left, or when a new congregation was being formed in another locality. At such a time, at least three men would be ordained to serve as the leaders of the new congregation.

~ The Qualifications of Elders ~

The term "Elder" can also be equated with those called "Bishops." The Apostle Paul told Timothy to be careful to only ordain men to the office of Bishop (or Overseer) if they met certain strict qualifications:

"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. ² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; ³not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; ⁴ one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶ not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. ⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (I Tim. 3:1-7)

In addition to the "Elders" or "Bishops," the Ancient Synagogue also had men designated as *Shamashim* שַׁמְשִׁים (shah-mah-sheem'). Today they might be called Deacons. In the Synagogue, the *Shamash* held the only paid position in the congregation. He was responsible for:

- ◆ The physical upkeep of the building --
- ◆ The dispersing of funds to the widows and orphans as designated by the Elders --

- ◆ The administration of penalties against those members of the congregation who might have lost a case before the *Beit Din* and --
- ◆ The translating, on Sabbath, of the *Torah* reading portion into the vernacular language for those in attendance who did not understand Hebrew.

Needless to say, the *Shamash* also had to meet some strict requirements:

"Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. ¹¹ Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua]." (I Tim. 3:8-13)

The interesting thing about the word translated as "Deacon" in the Greek Scriptures is that it is the very same word which is usually translated as "Minister." Whether a person is an "Elder," "Bishop," or "Deacon," he is first and foremost a "Minister:" one who is a servant of the people:

"But Jesus [Y'shua] called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave -- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" (Matt. 20:25-28)

This is probably the most important characteristic required of those who are asked to assume positions of leadership in a fellowship or community. They must have an attitude of wanting to serve the people, and not be a lord over them. This passage, in itself, gives the one-man, top-down, authoritarian approach to Church Government a thumbs down.

~ The Responsibilities of Elders ~

The Elders had the responsibility to rule righteously over their congregations. This is evident from the writings of Paul:

"Let the elders who rule [*proistemi*] well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" (I Tim. 5:17-18)

The Greek word *proistemi* (rule) is defined as:

"1) to set or place before 1a) to set over 1b) to be over, to superintend, preside over 1c) to be a protector or guardian 1c1) to give aid 1d) to care for, give attention to 1d1) profess honest occupations."

Not only are Elders to rule or "preside over" their congregations, they are also to be "protectors" and "guardians." This certainly is in agreement with the tradition as found in the Ancient Synagogue.

One of the primary functions of synagogue Elders was to render judgments concerning disputes between members of their congregation. This was done through the formal sitting of the *Beit Din*. The Elders of the synagogue had a great responsibility, for they were expected to render righteous and impartial judgment as commanded in the *Torah*:

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD [YHVH] your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. ¹⁹ You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. ²⁰ You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD [YHVH] your God is giving you." (Deut. 16:18-20)

These "Elder/Judges" were required to follow some very strict guidelines so that people who came before their "court" could expect to receive Righteous Judgment in the sight of both God and men. They were warned about the temptation to accept bribes, and thereby pervert justice against the poor.

However, partiality can also be shown even when no bribe is present. For example, when a judge is required to make a decision against a powerful person in the community, it can be intimidating; especially in a small Community (Synagogue) where the judges and the one being judged have to personally interact on a regular basis in the running of that community. Nevertheless the *Torah* is clear that partiality must not be shown to the rich or powerful. On the other hand, a judge is also not to favor a poor person just because he is poor and in need. If a poor person has broken the law he must be dealt with just like anyone else:

"You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor." (Lev. 19:15)

Above all, Righteous Judges are to condemn the wicked and justify the position of the righteous:

"If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, ..." (Deut. 25:1)

There were some traditional rules concerning the Elders of a synagogue which were put in practice to help insure against unjust judgments. For example, the practice was to have an odd number of members on the *Beit Din* (three, five, etc.) so that a definitive decision could always be made. The Elders were not to receive remuneration for their work (they were expected to support themselves -- usually through teaching), and there could not be two members of the same family on a single *Beit Din*.

While none of these measures could positively insure that a Judge would not become corrupt, nevertheless, they were

instituted to at least aid in the reaching of the goal of having Righteous Judges.

~ The Character of the Righteous Judge ~

The bottom line is that Righteous Judgment depends upon the moral character of the one making the Judgment. Throughout history, God has consistently looked for men and women who were willing to sacrifice their own needs so that righteousness might prevail. One of the first examples we have is found in the person of *Noah* נֹחַ (#5146 - Noh-ack' = Noah):

"But Noah found grace [*chen* = favor] in the eyes of the LORD [YHVH]. ⁹ This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just [*tzadik* = righteous in conduct and character] man, perfect [*tamim* = complete or whole] in his generations. Noah walked with God." (Gen. 6:8-9)

Here then is one of the first keys in the Scriptures which tells us how to find *khen* כֶּן (#2580 - khehn = favor or grace) with God. It is by conducting all of our affairs in a righteous and just manner. To do so makes one a *Tzadik* צַדִּיק (#6662 - Tzah-deek'), a Righteous Man. Likewise, to be *Tamim* תָּמִים (#8549 - tah-meem') means to act in an honest and perfect manner, without any hint of intrigue.

Avraham is another example of what it means to be a Righteous Man in the sight of God. He too was *Tamim* -- complete or whole, and totally honest:

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD [YHVH] appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless [*tamim*]. ²And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.'" (Gen. 17:1-2)

It is interesting to note that the word *Tamim* is also used in relationship to Tabernacle Offerings, for all animals offered there had to be "without blemish" (*tamim*).

~ Various Functions of Elders ~

One other passage in the New Testament is important to this discussion, for it deals with various positions within the Messianic Community:

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers..." (Eph. 4:11)

There is some minor disagreement on whether there are five "ministries" or four found in this passage. Some believe that "pastors and teachers" refer to one and the same thing, since "pastors" should also be able to "teach." However, not all "teachers" have the necessary skills to "pastor."

A more important consideration is the manner in which these particular jobs should be viewed. In most Protestant churches they are considered to be Offices to be filled by Elders. However, others believe they describe Functions in the Body of Messiah which can be filled by anyone, whether they have been ordained through the laying on of hands or not.

Another question is what the purpose of these various jobs might be in relationship to the *Ekklesia*?

"... for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ [Messiah]..."
(Eph. 4:12)

Whenever a Community member has a responsibility in the *Ekklesia*, the purpose is not to give honor to the person performing the job, but to edify the entire body. The end result of this edification is to bring Unity to the Community and to instruct them more fully in the work of *Messiah Y'shua*:

"... till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ [Messiah]..."
(Eph. 4:13)

The ultimate goal is to develop Messianic Believers who are living their lives in accordance with the way *Messiah Y'shua* lived His life:

"But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:4)

If all the members of the Messianic Community continue developing towards perfection, then false doctrine and false leadership will become identified for what it is and, hopefully, be rejected by all the members:

"... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ..."
(Eph. 4:14)

The end result of people performing these various functions (v. 11) will be Unity through Love; but only if that Love involves speaking the Truth. To speak falsehood, or allow sin in the Community because it pleases those who should be reprimanded, is not an act of Love for the rest of the Community:

"... but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ [Messiah] -- ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what

every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."
(Eph. 4:15-16)

It does not matter what "office" or "function" various members of the *Ekklesia* perform, as long as each person has the attitude of ministering and serving one another. The ultimate goal of all church government or Community rules should be love:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal."
(I Cor. 13:1)

~ Conclusion ~

Unity in the Messianic Community requires leaders who take their responsibilities seriously and are committed, above all else, to performing their duties in a manner that is in Righteous accord with the Laws and examples set forth in the Scriptures and performed from a heart filled with Love.

While this is true no matter what the job or function in the *Ekklesia* (Church Congregation) might be, it is of extreme importance when it comes to those who are responsible for administering the rules or laws of the Community. For all Messianic Believers those laws must be based firmly on the *Written Torah*.

Messianic Community leaders must be chosen only after much prayer and fasting, so that the desired Unity is within reach:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
(Eph. 4:1-3)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ The Application of ~ ~ Righteous Judgment ~

Do not judge according to appearance,
But judge with righteous judgment.
John 7:24



It is one thing to agree that the world would be a much better place if everyone accepted the *Written Torah* as the basis for the rule of law, and quite another to put *Torah* principles into actual practice in our own individual lives. It is even more difficult to put *Torah* principles into practice within our Messianic Fellowships and Communities. As we search for a way in which Messianic Believers can live together in Unity, it becomes evident that such a goal is only possible when the entire Community is pursuing Righteousness:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:1-3)

~ A Difficult Matter ~

Unity is no simple matter. For example, anyone who has attempted to obtain mutual understanding within a Fellowship (which generally meets only one day out of the week) knows that it is not easy to arrive at a consensus on what it means to:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD (YHVH) your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates." (Ex. 20:8-10)

The problematic word in this passage is what is meant by "work."

One simple solution to the resolution of such conflicts is to accept a single strong leader who imposes his or her will upon the entire fellowship or denomination.

Another way to solve problems is for a group of leaders to sit down together and work out the *Halacha* (the way one is to walk and obey God's commands). This is precisely what the Jewish Rabbis did in the 4th and 5th centuries and the end result is what we find today in Rabbinic Judaism, with its myriad of rules and fences around the *Written Torah* commands.

Unity problems can be many and varied. It is our opinion that a full blown Messianic Community (as opposed to a Fellowship) should not be attempted until many of these basic rules of communal behavior are established. In this way all

who wish to participate in the Community will understand what is expected of them before they commit to entering.

~ Two Ways to Judge ~

There are two primary Hebrew words used in Scripture to identify the Creator God. The first of these is *Elohim* אֱלֹהִים (#430 - Ehl-low-heem') and the other is the Tetragramaton *YHVH*. In Jewish teaching these two Hebrew words identify two main attributes of God. *Elohim* signifies He is a God of Justice, while *YHVH* signifies He is a God of Mercy.

It is most important to understand these two attributes of God and to see how both are necessary in order for a Community to function successfully. To emphasize one at the expense of the other brings either anarchy or totalitarianism. When it comes to human judgment, these two attributes are often out of balance, with some Communities tending towards strict justice, while others tending toward loose mercy. Neither of these extreme approaches is spiritually healthy.

God, however, has a different way of approaching Judgment. He is able to execute Justice while still being Merciful, and He wants His people to learn to do the same:

"Thus says the LORD [YHVH] of hosts:

"Execute true justice,

Show mercy and compassion

Everyone to his brother.""

(Zech. 7:9)

By following the examples found in Scripture, it is possible to begin bringing both Justice and Mercy into our Fellowship and Community Judgments.

~ Application Is Difficult ~

It is easy to discuss the principles of Righteous Judgment, as was done in the first chapter, and quite another matter to figure out a way for a local Community to put Righteous Judgment into action. While the theoretical might create differences of opinion, the misapplication of one or more of those principles can cause downright hostility among members of a Community.

An example to which all can relate would be conflict within a family, for the family is the smallest and most basic unit of Community. While adolescent and teenage members of a family may object to the rules established by their parents, it is more common to find a source of conflict to be the manner in which those rules are applied. Righteous rules applied in an inconsistent, vindictive, or arbitrary manner, can only cause division and strife.

The same is true within a Community of adults who have willingly joined together in a communal relationship. However, before a Community can even begin to apply Righteous Judgment, they must agree as to what is Righteous and what is not. That is why agreement must first be reached as to what constitutes the Righteous Bedrock upon which the Community is to be built. For us, that Bedrock is *Torah* Law. In contrast, some Protestant Communities might choose only the New Testament as a Foundation.

~ Common Beliefs ~

For the purpose of this chapter we will assume that the Community about which we are referring is a Messianic Community. That is, it is a Community of Believers who hold in common some basic beliefs:

1.) There is a God who created the heavens and the earth:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1)

2.) That *Y'shua HaMashiach* is His only begotten Son who gave His life so that all mankind might be saved from the death penalty which results from having committed sin:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

3.) That all Scripture (Genesis through Revelation) is God breathed:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (II Tim. 3:16-17*)

4.) That because all members of the Messianic Community are followers of *Y'shua HaMashiach*, they should show Love for one another:

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

5.) That *Y'shua HaMashiach* is going to return and establish the Kingdom of God:

"And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ [*Messiah*], and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Rev. 11:15)

We believe that most Christians accept these five principles. However, knowing human nature, surely there would be those who would object to one or more. For this reason, any given Community might wish to add to or modify this list based upon their communal understanding. The important thing is that all members of the Community be able to accept a basic set of principles upon which that Community can be founded. For example, in order for us to personally participate in a Messianic Community, we would want to see at least two more principles added:

6.) That the *Written Torah* law is still in effect today and that the violation of *Torah* Law is sin:

"Everyone who keeps sinning is violating *Torah* -- indeed, sin is violation of *Torah*." (I John 3:4 CJB)

7.) That all members of the community agree to observe the seventh day Sabbath and the annual Festivals:

"And the LORD [*YHVH*] spoke to Moses, saying, ²Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD [*YHVH*], which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'" (Lev. 23:1-2)

~ Scriptural Worms ~

These last two principles immediately opens up a can of Scriptural worms, even in the Messianic Movement. It might surprise some of our readers to learn that many Messianic Jews believe the *Torah*, the Sabbath, and the Annual Festivals were given only to the Jewish people, and that Messianic Gentiles do not need to observe them. Some go so far as to say that Messianic Gentiles must not observe the Sabbath and the Festivals.

This is most definitely not our position. For many years now (through the *Gentiles and the Law* series and other writings), *Hebrew Roots* has been proclaiming that the *Written Torah* commands (which include the observance of the Seventh Day Sabbath and the Annual Festivals) are to be kept by all Believers:

"Also the sons of the foreigner

Who join themselves to the LORD [*YHVH*], to serve Him,

And to love the name of the LORD [*YHVH*], to be His servants --

Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,

And holds fast My covenant --

⁷ Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,

And make them joyful in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices

Will be accepted on My altar;

For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all

nations." (Isa. 56:6-7)

Even if agreement is reached that all Messianic Believers are to observe the Sabbaths -- another question then arises as to which calendar is to be followed.

These are just two of the major questions which should be addressed before people make a commitment to living together in Community. However, there are many more such questions which must also be addressed so that new Community Members know what to expect. Naturally, as time progresses, more questions will arise which must also be resolved through Righteous Judgment.

~ Is There a Solution? ~

What then is the solution to this problem of living in Community? Are Messianic Believers destined to live apart from one another because they cannot get along? Are they to only have direct contact with each other on Sabbath and Festivals? As was pointed out in the previous chapter -- many Messianic Believers find it difficult to even be in fellowship with one another due to doctrinal differences. Whether or not people with divergent doctrinal differences can remain in fellowship with others who disagree often depends on how adamant they are concerning their doctrinal positions.

* The Scriptures Paul was referring to (II Tim. 3:16) did not include the New Testament for it had not yet been written.

Sometimes the doctrinal differences are so great, and the people involved are so adamant about their positions, that the only possible solution is to form two different Fellowships or Communities. Sad, but true!

The question is not whether there will be problematic differences of opinion -- the question is: How can these differences be successfully resolved so that Brethren can dwell together in unity?

**"Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!"**

(Psalm 133:1)

~ Unity In Community ~

Unity is very important to God:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all. ⁷But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's [Messiah's] gift." (Eph. 4:1-7)

God is a God of Unity -- not division. *Y'shua* emphasized this when He said:

"I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)

Not only are the Father and *Y'shua* "One," as His Disciples we also are to be "One" with both *Y'shua* and the Father, and also with each other:

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they all may be one, 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. ²²And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (John 17:20-23)

The major work of the leadership of the Messianic Community is to help the members of that Community grow up into Unity so that the Body of Messiah can grow spiritually:

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ [Messiah], ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ [Messiah]; ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ [Messiah] -- ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies,

according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:11-16)

Unity is more likely to be achieved when the Congregation or Community receives Righteous Instruction. For when Truth is taught, all of the sly doctrines which sound good, but are not in full accordance with Scripture, can be rooted out as they are discovered.

~ Differences of Opinion ~

Unity is the ultimate goal. However, there are many different paths leading to that goal. Different people walk different paths, depending on the direction from which they are coming. Messianic Believers coming from different backgrounds bring with them different Scriptural understandings.

In most Christian circles, it is generally believed that heresy is a terrible thing and the heretic must be eliminated from the Community at all costs. In the past this misunderstanding has led some denominations to go so far as to burn people at the stake. However, a careful examination of the Greek word *haireisis*, reveals that one of its definitions is: "dissension's arising from diversity of opinions."

It is through this definition that one can understand Paul's statement:

"For there must be also heresies among you, ..." (I Cor. 11:19 KJV)

Differences of opinion are necessary so:

"... that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (I Cor. 11:19 KJV)

In other words, it is through differences of opinions that Fellowships and Communities are able to come to a better understanding of the Truth. This goal, of course, requires work, and some in the Community may decide to leave prior to working through to the end of the matter. However, even if a Community talks through all of its differences on a particular topic, differences may still remain. At that point, the Community faces the decision of whether or not they can agree to disagree without being disagreeable, and thereby remain together in Community despite their differences.

There are, however, heresies which are so far removed from Scripture that Peter called them damnable heresies:

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." (II Pet. 2:1 KJV)

The Apostle John gave another example of a damnable heresy:

"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] has come in the flesh is of God, ³and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the

Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world." (I John 4:2-3)

This particular doctrine was an integral part of those who later became known as *Gnostics*. Some *Gnostics* taught that *Y'shua* was only a spirit and merely inhabited a fleshly body, and that His conscious spirit departed prior to the crucifixion leaving only the fleshly body to die on the cross:

"And from such people turn away!" (II Tim. 3:5)

~ Building a Spiritual Temple ~

Up to this point we have looked primarily at some of the possible problems and pitfalls involved in developing a Community. Let us now look at what it takes (at least in part) to build a Community.

Already mentioned is the need to have overall principles which form the Bedrock of the Community. We believe this Bedrock is to be the *Written Torah*; which contains the story of the creation of mankind, the call of *Avraham*, *Yitzhak*, and *Ya'acov*, the giving of the Law, and the building of the nation of Israel under the leadership of *Moshe* and *Aharon*. This story continues with the Prophets and culminates in the New Testament with testimonies of the appearance of *Y'shua HaMashiach*, who taught His disciples the proper way to observe the Law of God:

"For to this you were called, because Christ [*Messiah*] also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

²² **'Who committed no sin,
Nor was deceit found in His mouth;'** [Isaiah 53:9]

²³ **who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed."** (I Pet. 2:21-24)

It is important to understand that since the time of the Patriarchs, God has been working with both the people of Israel and those from other nations who desire to join Redeemed Israel. This is still true today, for the Apostle Paul taught that Gentile Believers are grafted into the Commonwealth of Israel, rather than Messianic Jews being joined to a Gentile Church:

"For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you." (Rom. 11:16-18)

God has built a firm Foundation upon *Torah* Bedrock:

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, ..." (Eph. 2:19-20)

The Cornerstone of this Foundation is none other than the Messiah:

"Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] Himself being the chief cornerstone, ..." (Eph. 2:20)

We are being built together into a Temple upon this holy Foundation and Cornerstone:

"... in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:21-22)

A greater Spiritual Temple is still under construction. It is in the process of being built right now, and every Messianic Believer has a potential place in it. Some may be likened to huge stones that have been chiseled into just the right size and shape to fit in a place where they rest on similar stones below and provide adequate support for the stones being placed above. Such a stone is extremely important; for if it were to crumble, the stones above would be weakened and also become susceptible to cracks and deterioration.

Others may be likened to strong cedar beams supporting the roof. Still others could be likened to the precious gold which overlays much of the building, both inside and out. The analogies are almost endless. However, one thing is clear. As Messianic Believers, we are not building the Temple by ourselves, we are being built into a Temple made by God:

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." (I Cor. 3:16-17)

~ One Body ~

We must not judge others for being a different piece of building material in the Spiritual Temple. Rather we must allow God to mold us into what He desires us to be. After all, He is the potter and we are the clay:

**"But now, O LORD [*YHVH*],
You are our Father;
We are the clay, and You our potter;
And all we are the work of Your hand."** (Isa. 64:8)

Paul wrote about how Messianic Believers are all part of one body:

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? ¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now indeed there are many members, yet one body." (I Cor. 12:13-20)

~ One Head ~

One of the major leadership problems in the Messianic Community is the tendency of some to desire to be the head of the body rather than being satisfied with where God has placed them. What many forget is that no man is eligible to be the head. That position, or function, is held by none other than *Y'shua*. He is the only one qualified to hold such a lofty position, because He is the only one who has lived as a man and not sinned. For this reason, all decisions made within a Messianic Community need to be submitted to Him for review, correction, and final approval. This must be done through heart felt prayer by those in the Community who have been entrusted with the task of being Righteous Judges.

The ultimate outgrowth of people wanting to be the head is One Man Rule, where a single person is recognized as the ultimate authority in the Community and everyone else must obey whatever he/she teaches. While members may feel that their strong leader is really in tune with the Scriptures, and knows God's will, and therefore will accept his/her claimed right to set *Halacha* for the Community, mainstream Christianity brands such behavior as the sign of a heretical cult. We must remember that *Moshe* was successful at being just such a leader because of his extreme humbleness:

"Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. ² So they said, 'Has the LORD [YHVH] indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?' And the LORD [YHVH] heard it. ³ (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)"

(Num. 12:1-3)

In addition, *Moshe* had a body of advisors; the foremost being his brother *Aharon*, but also included were the Seventy Elders:

"So the LORD [YHVH] said to Moses: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you.'"

(Num. 11:16)

Y'shua warned against the strong leader approach:

"But Jesus [*Y'shua*] called them to *Himself* and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.'"

(Matt. 20:25-26)

The problem here is the desire of some to have rulership over others. This type of Lordship behavior comes very naturally to certain personality types. Yet, anytime a Community relies solely on one person's leadership, there are inherent dangers, for one never knows when a single leader might go astray and cease to follow God's lead.

~ A Better Way ~

A better way, we believe, to deal with the establishment and operation of a Messianic Community is to have a number of people involved in leadership. The total number should depend upon how many people there are in the Community at large. Certainly, the minimum should be three, so that there will always be a tie breaking vote -- although the ideal is to always reach full consensus if at all possible:

"Where *there is no counsel, the people fall;*

But in the multitude of counselors *there is safety.*"

(Prov. 11:14)

In whatever manner a Community decides to be governed, the important thing to remember is that all members of that body must function together as a unified whole -- even when there are yet unresolved issues. Such Unity can come only when all members have Love for one another:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.'"

(John 13:34-35)

Loving one another is not strictly a New Testament concept, for it is integral to the Hebrew Scriptures as well; the basis being found in the *Torah* command:

"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD [YHVH]."

(Lev. 19:18)

This command does not require us to Love our neighbor more than ourselves. What it does teach is that we should treat others in the manner in which we wish to be treated. *Y'shua* expanded the Love command to include even one's enemies; for they too are our neighbors, even if they are bad ones:

"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.'"

(Luke 6:27-28)

Only when Judgments are made with an attitude of Loving Concern and Mercy for the person being judged, will there truly be Righteous Judgments. This is not to say that Judges should overlook sin, for there cannot be real Mercy unless a just resolution of the matter is first established. It is not merciful to forgive someone of a crime or sin when there has been no true repentance. That type of "mercy" merely encourages people to commit more sin.

True Mercy can only be given when a person has repented and then demonstrated his repentance by changing his behavior from sinful to righteous. The true goal of the Law is not punishment for sins, but changing the behavior of the sinner. That is why *Y'shua* called Mercy one of the "weightier aspects of the law:"

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and

mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." (Matt. 23:23)

~ Judging Ourselves ~

No Community, whether small or large, can survive indefinitely without having Righteous Laws (*Torah* Law) administered with Righteous Judgment, otherwise it will self destruct. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, we believe the only truly righteous laws available to man are the ones found in the *Written Torah* of the Holy Scriptures. They were given by a loving God for the benefit of mankind, not for the benefit of any particular group of people:

"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy." (James 4:12)

Ultimately, all mankind will face judgment based upon how well they observed the Righteous Law of God:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ [*Messiah*], that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (II Cor. 5:10)

Scripture teaches that it is much better for each one of us to learn to judge our own behavior in light of God's Law (the *Written Torah*), than it would be to live life with disregard for the *Torah* and wait for God to judge us:

"For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." (I Cor. 11:31-32)

This was one of the major reasons why David was said to be a "man after God's own heart." When confronted with his own sins, David was willing to admit them and seek the forgiveness of God through supplication and prayer:

"A Psalm of David.

A Contemplation.

**Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.**

**² Blessed is the man to whom the LORD [*YHVH*]
does not impute iniquity,**

And in whose spirit *there is* no deceit.

**³ When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.**

**⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.**

Selah.

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You,

And my iniquity I have not hidden.

**I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the
LORD [*YHVH*],'**

And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah." (Psalm 32:1-5)

~ Do Not Judge ~

While, as individuals, we are commanded to examine ourselves and judge our own behavior, attitude, and thoughts against the Righteous Law of the *Written Torah*, the Scriptures

also teach that we are not to pass judgment upon one another separate from the Fellowship or Community Judgment system:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

(Matt. 7:1-2)

As individuals, we are not to pass judgment upon our brethren. Instead, it is commanded that if we have something against our brother which cannot be resolved, that we take it to the *Beit Din* (Bait Deen = the House of Judgment) of our Messianic Community. Paul was adamant that Messianic Believers in dispute were not to take one another to Civil Court:

"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? ² Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ³ Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? ⁴ If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? ⁶ But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! ⁷ Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" (I Cor. 6:1-7)

Paul emphasized that it would be better for the wronged Brother to just accept the wrong done to him rather than take his Brother before a civil court. If Messianic Believers are living in Community -- it is the responsibility of the *Beit Din* of that Community to Judge differences between members.

Before a dispute between Brethren ever gets to the local *Beit Din*, there are other steps which *Y'shua* taught should be followed, in an attempt to solve the dispute in a righteous manner:

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church [*Beit Din*]. But if he refuses even to hear the church [*Beit Din*], let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

(Matt. 18:15-17)

It is our opinion that the following Scriptural steps should be taken in order for Righteous Judgment to be executed:

- ◆ Step 1 - Go to your brother directly and try and work out a satisfactory solution (v 15).
- ◆ Step 2 - If that does not work, take one or two witness with you (allow the other person to bring one or two witnesses as well) and try to negotiate a fair solution (v 16).

- ◆ Step 3 - If that does not work, take it to the *Beit Din* (the House of Judgment of the Church) for a final decision (v 17).
- ◆ Step 4 - If the losing party does not accept the ruling of the *Beit Din*, that person should be excluded from the Community (v 17).

However, once again it needs to be pointed out that just because the proper procedures are followed, that does not mean a Righteous Judgment will be rendered, since Righteous Judgments depend upon the Righteousness of the Judges and their proper understanding of *Torah* Law. In traditional practice in the first century, it was possible for the one who received a judgment against him to appeal to a citywide or regional *Beit Din* composed of more Elders.

~ Striving for Unity ~

The ultimate need of every Messianic Community is to achieve *Yachad* יָחַד (yah-kahd' #3162 = Unity) among the brethren. Unity is the lifeblood of the community, it is the ultimate goal and can only be brought about through the work of Righteous Judgment based upon Righteous Love.

It has been said that a Righteous Society rests upon three pillars:

- ◆ *Emet* אֱמֶת (Eh-meht' #571 = Truth). A Righteous Judge must extract the truth of the matter from the litigants and the witnesses involved in the dispute.
- ◆ *Tzedakah* צְדָקָה (Tzeh' dah-kah' #6666 = Righteousness or Justice). This involves applying the correct solution to the situation. The correct solution for a dispute within a Messianic Community is to follow the principles found in the *Written Torah* which pertain to the particular case.
- ◆ *Shalom* שָׁלוֹם (Shah-lohm' #7964 = Peace). While it may not be possible to extract the Truth in an atmosphere of total Peace, the Judge needs to strive for that goal so that the end result of a truly Righteous Judgment will be Peace between the litigants.

In our opinion, these three pillars are absolutely necessary for the successful operation of a Messianic Community. Whether the matter being resolved is large or small, important or trivial, the ultimate goal is for Brethren to live in Peace and Unity; the life blood of any Community:

**"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
² It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD [YHVH] commanded
the blessing --
Life forevermore."**

(Psalm 133:1-3)

If any of the three pillars are missing, the ultimate goal of Unity cannot be reached, because in order for there to be the sought after Unity, there must be Peace. In order for there to be Peace, there must be Justice. In order for there to be Justice, there must be Truth.

~ Truth ~

Whenever a dispute arises, the first order of business (after everyone is calmed down as much as possible) is to search for the Truth. It takes a very skillful Judge to be able to extract the real Truth of the matter, for each litigant and witness is going to see Truth through his own colored lens:

**"The first one to plead his cause seems right,
Until his neighbor comes and examines him."**

(Prov. 18:17)

There are two ways in which Judges attempt to extract Truth. The first method is Biblical and it is called *Impartial Discovery*. This method, if conducted properly, does not condemn an innocent person, it merely attempts to get at the facts of the matter by examining all of the witnesses. *Impartial Discovery* requires a skillful examiner, so that an accuser or witness is encouraged to give precise testimony and so that it can be determined that he is not a false witness.

The second method, which is often employed in societies which do not have "rule of law" as a guiding principle, is called *Inquisitorial Law*. This was the method used by the Roman Empire and also during the Inquisitions of the Roman Church in the Middle Ages. This kind of approach is designed to protect those in authority. Often the person being questioned is assumed to be guilty until proven innocent. In reality, the interrogator is merely fishing to find an appropriate charge. Torture is sometimes used in the *Inquisitorial Law* method. The *Torah* protects against *Inquisitorial Law* by requiring two or three witnesses to corroborate the charge, all of whom must be examined carefully:

"One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established."

(Deut. 19:15)

Another *Torah* safeguard against false witnessing is that if a false witness is discovered, the penalty which he hoped to have brought against his enemy is then brought against him personally:

"If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, ¹⁷ then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD [YHVH], before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. ¹⁸ And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, ¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. ²⁰ And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you."

(Deut. 19:16-20)

In this manner, a Righteous Judge attempts to discover the Truth (*Emet*) of a matter.

~ Justice/Righteousness ~

Once *Emet* (truth) has been discovered, the next step is to find a solution to the problem which brings Justice (*Tzedakah*) to all parties. Judges must always remember not to exact a penalty for its own sake, but only if it will bring about the desired result of serving Justice while bringing Peace to the Community. Letting people "get away" with wrong doing will not bring Peace and Unity. Neither will inappropriate punishment (whether too harsh or too lenient) bring the desired result. Above all, Justice must be meted out from a position of Love and Mercy, not from a desire to seek vengeance:

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.

**²⁰ Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.'**

[Proverbs 25:21-22]

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom. 12:19-21)

While it is proper to give your enemy food and drink, that does not release him from the evil he has done to you. Justice must still be served. For a Judge to let someone go unpunished, who has not confessed their sins, sought forgiveness, and made restitution, renders Justice powerless. Such an action is nothing less than a "compromise with oppressors."

On the contrary, Justice that is not administered in a spirit of Love and Mercy becomes Vengeance, not Justice.

~ Peace ~

After *Emet* (Truth) has been discovered, and *Tzedakah* (Justice) has been served, then and only then can *Shalom* (Peace) be found for the community.

It is not only the Judges who must pursue a life of Righteousness. All the members of the Community must be dedicated to living Righteously through discovering and applying Truth. When this is done, Peace in Unity will follow.

Henri Baruk was a Jewish psychiatrist who lived in France where he practiced his profession before and after the Second World War. In his book *Tsedek*, Baruk makes the following astute observation:

"What is the difference between the justice of men and the justice of G-d? In the justice of men, ... the offender who sincerely regrets his sin and confesses it in a desire for atonement, is punished, while the one who is cunning enough to hide or disguise it is exonerated. In the justice of G-d, on the other hand, the offender who confesses his sin and shows a sincere desire to make amends for it by his deeds, is forgiven, while the offender who hides his sin is tormented by a thorn within him which makes him sick." (p. 94)

For sinners, Peace can only be found through the identification and confession of their sins, and prayer for forgiveness through the blood of *Y'shua*, followed by *Teshuvah* (teh-shoe'-vah = repentance and return) from sin to a lifestyle that is in accord with the *Torah* of God. Then, having been reconciled to God we are instructed by Paul to:

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*]." (Phil. 4:6-7)

~ The Evil Tongue ~

Most problems that arise within a Messianic Community do not hinge on criminal activity. More likely, they are based upon different interpretations of how a particular commandment is to be observed, on doctrinal issues, or on the speaking of *Lashon Hara* לָשׁוֹן הָרָע (lah-shown' #3956, hah-rah #7451 = the evil tongue). *Lashon Hara*, the speaking of evil or slander about another person, is the most common of all offenses:

"Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. ⁷For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

⁸ But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (James 3:5-18)

It is said that there are four scourges of the human race: murder, lewdness, idolatry, and slander mongering -- called *Lashon Hara*. The most common of these is *Lashon Hara*. Actually, *Lashon Hara* is a form of murder, for it can kill the reputation of an innocent person. (For more complete information on *Lashon Hara* see our booklet: *Guarding the Tongue*.)

The basic attitude behind *Lashon Hara* is unjustified hatred. The Rabbis teach that the Second Temple was destroyed because of lack of love among the people. Its most common manifestation was the speaking of *Lashon Hara* against one's neighbor.

How does a Righteous Judge deal with such difficult matters as the Evil Tongue? Only by discovering the Truth about what was really said, and attempting to find out why the speaker chose to say such awful things. Once these facts have been established, the Righteous Judge can help bring the offender to a place of understanding which leads to the confession of sin:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
(I John 1:8-9)

Negotiations that concern *Lashon Hara* are very delicate. Only a wise and skillful Judge can bring satisfactory closure to such emotional issues.

~ Summary ~

The desire among Messianic Believers to build Community with one another is most honorable. However, to actually build Community is very difficult, because of the widely divergent views which today's Messianic Believers hold.

Nevertheless, despite the inherent problems, we believe attempts need to be made in Messianic Community building ventures. We simply recommend that the participants enter such endeavors with their eyes wide open and that they not be lulled into a false sense of feeling that "everything will work

out despite the problems." It will only "work out" if all of the people involved are committed to making it work and by sticking together through thick and thin with attitudes of Merciful Love.

When it comes to the application of Righteous Judgment within the Messianic Community, it must be remembered that God uses two important criteria when making His Judgment decisions. Justice (the strict application of the Law) must be tempered by Mercy (but only if the offender is truly repentant and willing to change his behavior).

Probably the most destructive behavior which can plague a Messianic Community is the speaking of *Lashon Hara*, the Evil Tongue, which spreads stories about other people. Even when those stories are true, they affect the entire Community in a negative way.

When a Messianic Community truly comes together in Unity, it will be because Peace has prevailed among the members. For Peace to prevail, there must be Justice within the Community. For Justice to reign, there must be the discovery of Truth. Only then will true Unity be established and divisions among the Brethren will cease:

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."
(I Cor. 1:10)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Judge Not! ~

Then He said to them,
"Judge not, that you be not judged.
For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged;
And with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."
Matthew 7:1-2

Some time back, we received a letter from an individual (also signed by a second person) who had written to us before on the topic of when the twenty-four hour day begins. These individuals believe the day begins with daylight (or sunrise), not with evening or sunset the way it is traditionally understood. In a previous letter, we were asked to submit questions about when the day begins. Since we did not have any questions we did not submit any.

The holding of this opinion is not a problem to us personally, although we do believe that the 24 hour day begins at sunset. However, based upon the tone of the letter, the fact that we hold a position contrary to their belief appeared to be a problem to the writers.

The "morning" Sabbath doctrine is definitely not a new one. Several years ago, a different individual was very critical of us because we did not accept the same view. What is disturbing about these types of letters is not the doctrinal position taken by the writer(s), it is the spirit in which they are written.

~ The Letter ~

(No salutation)
"Dean and Susan Wheelock,"

"Since I (we) have not received any questions from you about when the 24 hour day begins and when the new moon starts, I will ask you some."

There followed eleven "questions" which he (they) wanted us to answer. Naturally, the questions were phrased in a manner that attempted to lead a person into their point of view.

It is interesting that when people are trying to prove a point, contrary to traditional understanding, they often come up with a variety of reasons why their view is correct. It reminds us of the time someone gave us a paper listing 18 reasons why *Shavu'ot* (Pentecost) should be observed on *Sivan 6* (in the manner of Rabbinic Judaism) and not on the first day of the week. The simple answer to that question is that the *Written Torah* clearly says the *Counting of the Omer* should begin on the day after the weekly Sabbath, not the day after the *Shabbaton* or High Day (see our booklet *Shavu'ot: The Feast of Weeks* for information on how we understand the counting of the *Omer*).

In the case at hand, concerning the beginning of the day, eleven reasons are not needed. All one has to do is read the first chapter of *Genesis* where it clearly states that each creation

day began with a dark portion and concluded with a light portion:

"God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day."
(Gen. 1:5)

No doubt, the letter writers had reasons why they do not accept this plain statement of Scripture.

The letter ended in this manner:

"Please respond within three and half days beginning tomorrow morning, or should I say 3 days and 3 nights (not 3 nights and 3 days) from when you receive this. I am sure you don't want Yahshua to say to you and your wife, 'I never knew you.'"

The following statement closes the letter after the signatures:

"If you get yourselves into a position where you are no longer teachable, you will never become a King and Royal Priest to be able to help others."

~ No Response ~

The "permitted" time elapsed and we did not respond to the "11 questions," nor will we respond to them except for this article. The reason there will be no response to this letter (and others that have come to us in the same spirit but on different subjects) is because it is fruitless to argue Scripture. When people have made up their minds one way, and we have made up our minds another way -- dialogue merely takes all of us away from more important matters:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. ..."
(Matt. 23:23-24)

There are just not enough hours in the day, nor days in the month, to respond to these types of questions, which inevitably require lengthy dialogue. Everyone's time can be spent in much more positive ways than wrangling over such issues:

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

(Gal. 5:13-16)

More importantly, we are not responding because it would lend credibility to the attitude expressed in the letter -- an attitude which points up a much more serious matter than disagreement over when the day begins.

What is so sad, is this same attitude can be found, in great measure, throughout the Messianic Movement today (and, for that matter, all of Christendom). It is an attitude of condescension and scorn towards those who do not share the same beliefs. It is often capped off by threatening hints that

one's salvation may be at stake if the desired response is not forthcoming.

This same attitude has come down to us through the centuries in myriads of ways within the confines of organized religion. It is the same attitude that requires "lay" people to call church leaders "Father," "Rabbi," or "Reverend." At its very worst, it is the same attitude which fostered the Inquisition.

This is what can happen when men set themselves up to be the keepers of God's authority. What they do not seem to understand is that God does not need any help in this realm -- He is perfectly capable of dealing with each of us as individuals, and if we have a personal relationship with Him, He does so on a regular basis:

"But from those who seemed to be something -- whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man -- for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me." (Gal. 2:6)

~ Salvation at Stake? ~

We fully support the interchange of ideas based upon sound Scriptural study, even when they are out of the mainstream, so that truth may be found and generally accepted:

"For there must be also heresies [differences of opinion] among you, that they [those doctrines] which are approved may be made manifest among you." (I Cor. 11:19)

That is the freedom we exercise as publishers of *Hebrew Roots*®. We encourage the same among others, however, this journal was not established as an open forum. It was begun as a personal outreach to friends and relatives. Over the years, many others came on board as subscribers. *Hebrew Roots*® is intended as a tool to communicate to others those things which we are learning about the Hebrew roots of the Faith.

It is our policy to never tell people they must believe everything we teach or risk losing their salvation. We have always asked that our readers:

"Test all things; hold fast what is good."

(I Thess. 5:21)

Just because we believe and teach something does not make it true. Conversely, just because we believe and teach something does not make it false.

Although this particular letter does not directly condemn us to the Lake of Fire (we have also had those in the past), it certainly alludes that such might be our fate if we do not "get with the program" of this particular doctrinal deviation.

It is our strongly held opinion that the interchange of alternative doctrinal positions is fine. However, those discussions need to be conducted in a spirit of humility and love, not in a spirit of accusation and judgment. If a doctrinal position paper contains truth, those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear will see that truth and adjust their beliefs and practices accordingly.

~ Sincerity ~

Let us be very clear. These men appear to be very sincere about their belief in God and they seem to want to please Him

by doing exactly what they understand to be the correct manner. However, when they judge the salvation of others based upon their personal understanding of the Scripture, they err in judgment:

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; ²⁰ knowing this first, that no prophecy [inspired text] of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹ for prophecy [inspired text] never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

(II Peter 1:19-21)

We believe the position set forth in the above letter is a "private interpretation" that is not based on Scriptural fact nor historical observance. Perhaps some obscure sect did follow this pattern centuries ago (there truly is nothing new under the sun), but there is no evidence that *Y'shua* deviated from the common practice of the Temple during His time, where the Priests always began a new 24 hour day, including the Sabbath, at sunset.

~ To Judge or Not to Judge? ~

The Greek Scriptures (New Testament) seem to contradict themselves when it comes to the subject of judging. First of all, there are the words of *Y'shua*:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

(Matt. 7:1-2)

Contrast that statement with the following:

"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? ² Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ³ Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? ⁴ If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? ⁶ But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!"

(I Cor. 6:1-6)

So, are Believers to judge one another or not? *Y'shua* said not to -- Paul said we should. So what is being communicated here?

The answer is really quite simple. *Y'shua* was talking about Messianic Believers making their own private judgments about the manner of observance found in other Believers. *Y'shua* said that was not our individual calling. We are to let Him be the judge of such things, and not try to impose our beliefs and practices (true or false) upon others. Paul concurred with this teaching:

"So don't let anyone pass judgment on you in connection with eating and drinking, or in regard to a

Jewish festival or *Rosh-Hodesh* or *Shabbat*.¹⁷ These are a shadow of things that are coming, but the body is of the Messiah."
(Col. 2:16-17 CJB)

As Messianic Believers, we are especially forbidden to consign people who deviate from our personal doctrines to eternal damnation. That does not mean we are to hide our beliefs and practices under a bushel, for *Y'shua* told us to be a light to the world:

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden."
(Matt. 5:14)

However, just because we hold to a particular doctrine does not give us license to condemn others who disagree. We can condemn their doctrine and judgmental attitude (if there is one) behind the doctrine, but not the sincerity or spiritual status of the holder of the doctrine.

If people choose to begin the Sabbath at dawn that is their choice. However, they should not tell us that we need to do the same or risk damnation. Also, to demand that others enter into dialogue about such matters on pain of loss of a direct relationship with *Y'shua* is counter productive. For us, that attitude brings an immediate end to whatever dialogue there might have been in the first place, no matter how worthy the subject.

This attitude has been a problem in the Messianic Community for the last 2000 years -- people judging other people and causing much dissension in the ranks. Many people have been immeasurably hurt by such actions. All of you could probably name certain Christian sects who make a regular practice of "disfellowshipping" those from among their midst who do not adhere to the party line. In many cases, such dissension is over man-made interpretations of God's law, or on the issue of who has authority, not on the instructions of the *Written Torah* itself.

~ Righteous Judgment ~

But what about the I Corinthians passage? It seems to state that Messianic Believers need to judge one another. The answer is quite simple.

What is being spoken of there was the practice in the first century synagogue of having an internal court of law, called the *Beit Din* (Bait Deen = House of Judgment). Every synagogue had a minimum of three "Elders" who comprised the local *Beit Din* and heard arguments concerning cases which were brought before them.

For example, if Brother A thought that he had been cheated in a business transaction by Brother B, that matter was supposed to be resolved by the *Beit Din*, not by a secular court of law administered outside of the synagogue. That is exactly what Paul was talking about here. This goes right along with what *Y'shua* said about an important aspect of Pharisaic authority:

"Then Jesus [*Y'shua*] spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,² saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.³ Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.'"
(Matt. 23:1-3)

There is confusion concerning this passage, and the verses which follow, with two opposing positions being espoused. One states that the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat and we should do everything they tell us to do -- i.e. keep the *Oral Torah* (traditions) of Rabbinic Judaism. Another school believes this passage has been mistranslated and that it really indicates that we should only follow *Moshe's* written teaching and not that of the Scribes and Pharisees. This school claims the underlined word "they" should be translated as "he." In other words, they teach that Messianic Believers should only follow the instructions of *Moshe*, as recorded in the *Written Torah*, and not follow the *Oral Traditions* of the Scribes and Pharisees.

~ A Dual Teaching ~

It is our opinion that *Y'shua* was addressing two different but closely related topics here. To begin with, He expressed support for the local *Beit Din* of the synagogue by saying that when a Believer brought a case before the *Beit Din* for judgment, that person had to agree to abide by the court's final judgment, even if it went against him. Thus, the symbolism of *Moses' Seat*, was one of authoritative judgment. It was an actual physical chair found in 1st century synagogues and was invariably occupied by Pharisees, only because they ran the synagogues in the first century. The head Elder (*Nasi* or president) would take his place on *Moses' Seat* when required to pronounce a judgment arrived at by the entire court. Those decisions were binding upon all the litigants. Of course, the judges were expected to base their decisions upon the *Written Torah* commandments, with support from previously made court decisions on similar matters (case law).

However, *Y'shua* went on to state that just because the Scribes and Pharisees were required to give legal judgments on individual matters in a synagogue court of law (the *Beit Din*), that did not give them the right to add burdensome fences to the *Written Torah* when it came to the daily practice of the individual lives of the Believers:

"... but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.⁵ For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

"⁵ But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.⁶ They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues,⁷ greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, "Rabbi, Rabbi."⁸ But you, do not be called "Rabbi;" for One is your Teacher, the Christ [*Messiah*], and you are all brethren.⁹ Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.¹⁰ And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ [*Messiah*].¹¹ But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.¹² And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
(Matt. 23:3-12)

This is in keeping with the view expressed by Peter at the Jerusalem Council, that the many rules of the Pharisees were a yoke which was unbearable to the common person who had to earn a living for himself and his family:

"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] we shall be saved in the same manner as they.'"
(Acts 15:7-11)

Even today, the Rabbis speak of taking upon oneself the "yoke of the Torah," meaning all of the commands found in the *Oral Torah* in addition to those found in the *Written Torah*. (For more information on this topic write for the booklet *Which Law?*)

~ Resolving Disputes ~

Another clear example of the *Beit Din* being a synagogue court of law for resolving disputes between brethren, is found in the following often practiced but often misunderstood passage:

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

(Matt. 18:15-18)

There is little disagreement about the procedures set forth by *Y'shua* in verses 15-16. The bottom line is, if you have a dispute with a brother, try to work it out with him alone or, if that fails, with one or two hand picked brethren, who are hopefully skilled in negotiation. If the negotiation fails, there will then be people who can serve as witnesses before the *Beit Din*.

Where many people get off the track on this passage, is when they try to interpret verses 17 and 18. When it says to take the individual before the church it does not mean to drag the person into a church service, stand him up in front of the people, and air all of his dirty laundry in public. It means that, when negotiations fail to resolve the dispute, you are to bring the person (along with the witnesses) before the duly qualified *Beit Din* for a court hearing and a final resolution.

If one of the litigants refuses to abide by the decision of the *Beit Din* (as pronounced by those who sit in *Moses' Seat* of judgment), that person is to be put out of the congregation until such time as he repents, makes restitution (if required), and accepts the punishment handed down by the *Beit Din*. In this manner, whatever the local *Beit Din* court decides becomes

"bound" on earth and in heaven. If a person is acquitted, then that decision "looses" him from any kind of earthly or heavenly judgment. Presumably, if the *Beit Din* made an improper judgment, that decision will still be "bound" or "loosed" in heaven (whatever may be the case), but the members of the court will have to answer to God for rendering an unrighteous judgment.

Thus, *Y'shua* gave the Messianic Community the authority to practice judgment in a legal sense and in a prescribed manner. This "binding and loosing" passage does not give any self-appointed individuals the power to "bind and loose" as they see fit.

~ A Safeguard ~

The *Beit Din* not only heard civil cases between brethren, they were also expected to take action, when necessary, to safeguard the members of the community from those who were actively pursuing sin, lest others in the Messianic Community be drawn into similar practices.

The Congregation at Corinth was made up primarily of Gentiles who did not grow up in a synagogue environment and therefore had no background in how to properly apply *Torah* law. It appears the Corinthians were unsure how to exercise the proper authority which was vested in the *Beit Din*, thus, when one of their members began to sin openly, they seemed to be at a loss as to what action to take:

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles -- that a man has his father's wife! ² And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you."
(I Cor. 5:1-2)

Here was a case where a man and woman were defiling the entire congregation by their immoral behavior:

"Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened."
(I Cor. 5:6-7)

Because of their lack of experience in the legal matters of sin, the brethren in the Corinthian Congregation did not seem to know how to take appropriate action. Instead, they allowed a decidedly "liberal" attitude to prevail -- after all, one could say: "Its just the couple's lifestyle choice," or "They aren't hurting anyone."

Paul, hearing about the situation, told them what must be done:

"For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], ⁵ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*]. " (I Cor. 5:3-5)

It is our opinion, that upon receiving this letter, the Corinthians convened the local *Beit Din* in order to deal formally with the situation. They did not just kick the man out of the Congregation based upon Paul's letter.

Paul was especially concerned because the situation was having a negative effect upon the other members of the congregation:

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ Yet *I* certainly *did not mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner -- not even to eat with such a person." (I Cor. 5:9-11)

Sometime later, Paul encouraged the *Beit Din* to restore the man to the fellowship because he had apparently repented and ended his sinful relationship:

"This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, ⁷ so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. ⁸ Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him." (II Cor. 2:6-8)

Notice, this passage confirms that the Corinthian Congregation (through a majority vote of the *Beit Din*) took the action suggested by Paul. Likewise, the *Beit Din* was the official body that had to make the decision to restore him to the fellowship. Thus we see that the *Beit Din* was responsible for the well being of the entire congregation and not simply a court to hear disputes between brethren.

~ Personal Judging ~

When it comes to individuals judging other Messianic Believers (as opposed to a decision handed down by a legitimate *Beit Din*), the Scriptures are clear this is not to be done:

"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?"" (James 4:11-12)

Messianic Believers must especially avoid judging others based upon a criteria to which they themselves do not adhere:

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ² But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³ And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?" (Rom. 2:1-3)

In other words, if a person condemns another because they hold a different interpretation of scripture, and the person being condemned retaliates by condemning the first person for their belief as well, they have both sinned, because they have judged each other in a matter over which they have no authority.

An example is found in Romans 14 where Paul discussed the accusations going back and forth between those who would eat the meat served at fellowship meals as opposed to those who would only eat vegetables because they were unsure about whether the meat had been prepared in, what they considered to be, a proper kosher manner. Both sides were apparently at fault, because both were party to a condemning spirit:

"Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but not to disputes over doubtful things.* ² For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. ³ Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. ⁴ Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand."

"⁵ One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike.* Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day [*or when it begins*], observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it.* He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Rom. 14:1-8)

It is not our place to judge our brother's understanding of Scripture. That is Messiah's prerogative:

"But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ [*Messiah*]. ¹¹ For it is written:

'As I live, says the LORD [YHVH], Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.' [Isaiah 45:23]

"¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." (Rom. 14:10-12)

Paul's solution to the dilemma, that existed in the Roman congregation over food, was to teach by righteous example:

"*It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*" (Rom. 14:21)

"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." (I Cor. 8:13)

~ Forgiveness ~

Y'shua has the last word in this controversy about judging one another, whether it concerns when the day begins, when the

month begins, which calendar to use, how to count from the *Omer Wave Offering* to Pentecost, or any other of a myriad of differences of opinion about doctrine. He said that the criteria which a person uses to judge others is the same criteria which God will use to judge that person:

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."
(Matt. 6:14-15)

Forgiveness needs to become a part of our daily lives. When we forgive, it reflects the Father living in us, for he is a Forgiving God:

"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."
(Luke 17:3-4)

~ Finally ~

To the Brothers who sent us the letter, we forgive you for what we perceive to be a judgmental attitude. We know that

you are striving to please our Father in heaven. Please know that our desire is the same. We have studied the matter of when the day begins, and have reached a different conclusion. We apologize if our failure to respond to your previous letters offended you. Please be assured that that action was not discriminatory, we are just not able to give personal answers to the myriad of written correspondence we receive.

Finally, to all of our readers we quote:

"... whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23)

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
(I John 1:9)

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