

Handling DOCTRINAL Differences

When doctrine makes us separate or stay together

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by Philip Shields

Summary:

One of the main reasons people divide and separate is over doctrinal differences. This teaching goes into: what is doctrine? Where does true doctrine come from? How does scripture say we should handle doctrinal disagreements? Which doctrines are crucial to salvation and which ones are not – or are all doctrines crucial? How did Yeshua and Paul handle doctrinal disputes? What's the balance? I hope this teaching will speak to each one's heart.

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A warm welcome to you all from Orlando to the House of God in Yeshua our Messiah – whom most of you might call Jesus Christ. We welcome all of you wherever you are from – whether Turkey, France, Romania, Brazil, Kenya, China or here in the USA – it doesn't matter, welcome.

I've been talking about finding the true ekklesia that Messiah came to build. He said the gates of hades would not prevail against it. I hope you hear the last 2 part series on that. We found that:

- Our heavenly Abba is often *working with* people even long *before* He gives His Holy spirit.
 - **Think of Cornelius' household in Acts 10.** By the end of the chapter they are being given God's spirit but obviously Abba already considered them a part of "His" people and sent Peter to baptize them.
 - **Acts 18:10** – Yeshua tells Paul that in Corinth "I have many people here". Obviously most of those had yet to be converted.
- We also should not presume to tell our Father and our Savior where they should be working. Peter and the early apostles had to deal with the shocking reality that Yahweh was now working – not just with Israel/Judah – but with Gentiles. That was shocking, unheard of, as they had been raised that only they were the Chosen People.
- And the bottom line we found is that if someone has been given God's Holy Spirit – whether or not you or I feel they should have been given the Spirit – that person is a child of God and a part of that *ekklesia* Yeshua came to build. Period.

Besides power struggles and human vanity of wanting to be the one in charge – another big reason many of us can't seem to come and worship together is: we can't seem to agree doctrinally.

We have different beliefs while all claiming to be believers in Yeshua/Jesus. So we assume that the one "true church" is probably just "ours" because we are the only one with the right set of teachings or doctrine. Isn't that true, when you really analyze it?

Well, doctrine IS important, as we shall see. But when should, and when should compatible doctrine not be, the reason for worshipping together or not worshipping together. *Actually scripture tells us*, and we'll delve into that.

I will say this: if any two believers in the world talk and listen to each other long enough, they'll find out there are numerous things they disagree on. Even husbands and wives don't agree on everything – but they can live together and get along....

But at some point, if 2 married people disagree too strongly about too many vital points – at some point they do separate.

So now let's move on to the sticky topic of DOCTRINE – or our set of BELIEFS.

“Doctrine” defined: The word translated “doctrine” in the New Testament comes from basically 2 Greek words – *didache* and *didaskalia*, which refer to the act of teaching or that which was taught.

Doctrine = what we believe and teach. But that could either be right or wrong, right?

We'll cover:

- How important is right doctrine?
- How should we handle situations where we see wrong doctrine preached
- When do we draw the line in the sand and say we can't meet any longer with certain people who believe certain things
- And when do we realize a certain issue is NOT worth separating over.

I'm hoping many will search their hearts as a result of this meeting. Are we refusing to meet with other believers because they don't believe just like we do? And when we find someone doesn't believe as we do, how do we react? What do we do and say?

This sermon corrected me deeply as I prepared it. I can be very adamant and strong voiced at times when I feel I'm right. I hope it will speak to you too, and that more believers will be able to come together now as a result of this discussion.

But having said all that, is there a scripture that says “By this shall all men know you are my disciples, because all my true disciples have 100% perfect doctrine and every one of my disciples perfectly agrees with each other doctrinally”?

No, that's the biggest measure of God's children are! But indeed we do find that there were numerous doctrinal discussions going on in the early church and ever since. Part of the problem is that we each bring some “baggage” to the party. We each have been raised to believe certain things and even when Yahweh calls us to His Way, sometimes we bring more to the *ekklesia* than we should have. (Yes, even you and I did that.)

- Some early converts were Pharisees, now ex-Pharisees. (Acts 15:5) But they had been raised very strictly. They believed in the resurrection.
- Other early converts were from the priestly family (Acts 6:7) – and they often were Sadducees, who before conversion would clash with the Pharisees.
- Then when Gentiles came into the mix, now it really started getting interesting – with all their notions of what “God” meant to them, based on what they had learned from the Olympic gods and goddesses. It's hard to discard everything all at once.

We're no different today. Any of us coming out of whatever prior background --Catholicism or the numerous parts of Protestantism or Hebrew Roots or Judaism or even those raised as sabbath keepers all their lives -- have their set of entrenched beliefs too.

So what do we see even among serious 7th day sabbath-keeping believers in Christ? We believe **different things** about – a thousand different things – but here are a few:

- Are all the holydays to be kept? Or just “the Lord’s Supper”?
- Which Calendar should we follow if we do keep the holydays?
- Some of you refuse to meet with anyone who says “God” instead of “Elohim” or Yahweh. Or some condemn those who say “Jesus” instead of “Yeshua”.
- How the sabbath is to be kept. Some won’t cook at all. Some won’t eat out on the sabbath at all. We personally don’t go to restaurants on the sabbath but is it my job to condemn those who do?

I’m hoping this message will speak to thousands of you around the world and help you examine your heart and attitudes towards other believers in the *ekklesia* Yeshua founded.

FROM WHERE DOES RIGHT TEACHING/DOCTRINE ORIGINATE?

If we’re going to start believing the same and right doctrine, we need to know how we find true doctrine. Where does it come from?

You’d think the answer to this is obvious, but the way it is practiced makes me realize it is not obvious. So where does true teaching and belief come from? Most of you might say the Bible, I hope, and that’s partly true – but the Source goes even higher.

- Jesus, who was and is the Living WORD and Truth, says where HIS teachings, HIS doctrines came from.

John 7:14-18

Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. 15 And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" 16 Jesus answered them and said, "**My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.** 17 If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. 18 He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.

So right doctrine comes from GOD the Father, through Christ, thru the written Word of God. It does not come by a bunch of people deciding what makes sense or will be palatable – but what the Word says! NOT from Kabbalah, NOT from uninspired uncanonized books, nor from what we can glean from Eastern religions (a trend I’m seeing). It comes from God the Father, through Yeshua, through the written Word of God. Nothing else. Period.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“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.”

Our source of teaching should be God through His word; using ALL the scriptures on a particular subject; the WHOLE counsel of God. You'll notice I use a ton of scriptures in my sermons. I've heard messages where hardly a scripture or two were actually ever cited. Some popular mega-church ministers speak more in pop-psychology and feel-good series of stories rather than building from the rock of God's word.

Long ago the established religion of the Roman Catholic Church started deciding what they wanted people to believe. So they taught a change in one of the 10 commandments and forbade anyone from keeping the 7th day Sabbath. Mankind has no right to do that. But really virtually every church organization has made some doctrinal decrees that seem clearly to go against scripture in some points, whether we're talking about Catholic, Protestant, sabbath-keeping groups – they all have come out with man-made commands.

These man-made commands end up as doctrines that divide the people of God.

Judaism certainly has done that. Yeshua even said they ended up nullifying God's commandments by their oral law traditions. Most Orthodox Jews give more weight and time to their Talmud and Mishnah than they do to scripture directly. So we see a plethora of rules and do's and don'ts about the sabbath, about washing hands, which shoe to put on first (no kidding) – all man-made rules.

Some even studying KABBALAH. I truly don't think we should be.

BE CAREFUL about making hard and fast rules especially where scripture is silent! I've seen rules about what people should wear exactly to church services, for example. When Yeshua sent out his disciples, they took only the clothes on their backs, so when sabbath came, that's still all they had! (Matthew 10:5-10). And James talks about the poor man who comes into services in shabby garments (

Look at what Yeshua said about this form of doctrine: **the COMMANDMENTS OF MEN**

Matthew 15:1-9

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 2 "Why do Your disciples transgress **the tradition of the elders**? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." [They hadn't done the *traditional* washing]

3 He answered and said to them, "**Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?** 4 For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' 5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" — 6 then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

8 "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And *in vain they worship Me, **Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.***"

So there you have it. Are your pastor's requirements from scripture – all of the scriptures on a subject – or is he teaching his preferences and making up "commandments of men"?

And I've seen doctrines and teachings rise up – and I've slipped into it also at times – where we define what exactly is allowed and not allowed as dress, as hair styles, as things we do or can't do on the sabbath, what in detail we must avoid in foods, whether the sundown on sabbath is the visible sundown or is that just a refraction of the sun and the sun has really already set... and on and on. Some rule on what kind of music is allowed in church or on the sabbath; what exactly women can and can't do.

And so we MISS the POINT of all of scripture: LOVE GOD and love one another.

Don't be guilty of what Yeshua teaches: that it's possible to be striving to be so careful in how we obey (and focus on) every tiny little point that we become a stench to everyone. "IN VAIN do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of MEN." We "**major in the minors**" as we strain at gnats and tiny seeds while missing the big points of God's way – justice, mercy and faith (see **Matthew 23:23-24**).

So I say again: focus on the BIG 2 – love for God and love for one another, all while we try to be speaking truth to one another.

How Important is Right Doctrine (Very)

Think of right doctrine, for a moment, as simply being "the truth". How important is truth? How important is right/true doctrine? *Is there any time when we "agree to disagree" as we continue to meet together – or is there never such a time?*

Yeshua's example in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well tells us a lot. She was goading him into an argument over who had the more important site – the Samaritans and their Mt Gerizim - - or the Jews (Jerusalem). Notice how Yeshua handles this:

John 4:21-24

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him MUST worship in spirit and TRUTH."

So all of us worshiping the true God MUST worship in spirit and truth. We can't and shouldn't allow ourselves to worship God in what we know to be scripturally wrong, or something untrue. For example:

- It's easily proven that Yeshua was not born on Dec 25, the very day that pagan deities all around the globe were said to have been born.
- It's not true that Santa flies around the world with flying reindeer.
- It's not true God changed one of his top 10 commandments to worship him from the 7th day sabbath to the day of the sun, on the first day.

So if you know something is scripturally unsound, you can't participate in it. If we do, we're no longer worshiping God in truth. So yes, right doctrine is very important.

Yeshua warned his disciples to beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:11-12).

So combine that with what he taught in Matthew 15 that it's possible to worship in vain if:

- Our hearts aren't in our worship. We need to be worshipping from our hearts.
- We need to base our doctrine on truth from the Word, not commandments of men.

Is our worship more about facts and data – or time invested in loving God with all our heart? Worship is a relationship, not just doctrinal facts and data.

So right doctrine *is* important and Yeshua even said it's one of the signs of true disciples.

John 8:31-32

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.* 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

But is having the right doctrine the MAIN sign, the big thing? Can you find a verse that says "*By this will all men know you're the true church because you have all the right doctrines.*"

We know better. We know love for one another is THE big new covenant sign of true disciples (John 13:33-34) but we ACT like having all the true doctrine down pat is the biggest sign. And who's to say we or anyone else has all true doctrine perfectly?

We get so stuck on doctrine – that we end up forgetting all about having the gracious civility and love for one another, especially for those who believe somewhat differently. But neither does this mean we can ignore doctrine either.

When the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:20 tried to say the Samaritan doctrine was the right one, and emphasized they had Mt. Gerizim – the “right place” --we do find that Yeshua set her straight on that point, but gently. So doctrine is not to be ignored, but neither is it to be pushed at the expense of graciousness and civility. Yeshua basically told her – the place – whether Mt Gerizim or Jerusalem – is not as important as worshipping Father in spirit and TRUTH.

I will admit: I'm having to learn this very point myself – of gently discussing differences. I'll say much more about this shortly.

Here's more on how important having right doctrine is:

- Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:11-16 that the saints were to be equipped for the work of ministry—UNTIL we all come to the unity of the faith (v 13), so we're no longer tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men (Verse 14).
- We are to study to be able to give a good strong answer, done gently, of why we believe what we believe (1 Peter 3:15) and have the hope we have – but he clearly says we are to explain our beliefs and hope (our doctrine) with meekness and fear.

This meekness is important. The more we study, the more I realize this knowledge can go to our heads as “knowledge puffs up”. It can make us vain, proud and condescending of what we know and we stop listening to anyone else.

1 Corinthians 8:1-2

“Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. **Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.** *And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.*”

Don't STRIVE over words, or over doctrine for that matter

2 Timothy 2:14-17

“Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord **not to strive about words to no profit**, to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, *a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* 16 **But shun profane and idle babblings**, for they will increase to more ungodliness.”

So having right doctrine is important, and it comes from our Father through his Word. **Period. Some people spend a lot of time in the non-canonized, non-inspired books** – that though they may have some things to teach us, they are not God-breathed scripture and we must not base our doctrine on them. They can often become sources of contention.

1 Timothy 1:4

“Don't give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”

Paul goes on to tell Timothy watch for those who are obsessed with disputes and strivings over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling,” 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

In the audio, for an example of **“striving over words”**, I discuss the contention over the doctrine that we cannot say a pagan god's name. Some even say “Amen” is rooted in paganism, though it's used in the original Hebrew many times. The names of pagan gods are mentioned often in scripture, so whatever our understanding of the admonition not to discuss them, it is clear that scripture does. Even one of the months of the Hebrew calendar – Tammuz – is of pagan origin. And we'd have a hard time speaking English unless we were on our guard constantly. We use words with pagan roots without even realizing it – like “cereal”, from the pagan god Ceres, god of the harvest. Virtually all the days of the week and all the months of the year and names of the planets all come from pagan gods and goddesses.

Have you ever drunk a Sprite? Do you speak of your cars with pagan names (Saturn, Mercury), or ever use the word “cereal” – which comes from the pagan god “Ceres”. Insomnia – a combination of 2 pagan gods' names. How about these words with pagan roots: *fortune, fortunate, narcissistic, echo, harp, titanic struggles, titans, herculean, volcano, vulcanize, fateful, fate* – and so many more. And if we add English words from non-European sources, we can't ever refer to someone being at “the top of the totem pole” – as that's pagan too. And what about your Nike shoes?

My point is, most of us probably use words we don't even know came from a pagan god – every single day! But seriously, could this be, until Christ returns and sets the language we use to a pure language, could this be for now a “striving over words”? Is it something we need to be dividing over? I don't think so. Believe what you believe, but don't divide over something like this.

2 Tim 2:23-26

“But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. 24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”

Wow, did you get all that? *We must NOT quarrel, but be gentle to all, patiently and humbly correcting those in opposition. Yes, doctrinal error must be addressed, but it must be addressed gently, patiently and humbly. Most of us aren't so good at all that, including me. I certainly have seen many, many websites that list ministers by name, that BLAST away at things this man or that man said in a sermon or letter – and is this of God? Out of the thousands of false ministers during the life of Paul and John and others, only 3-4 get mentioned by name!*

In another pastoral epistle to Titus, a minister, he says it again:

Titus 3:9

“But AVOID foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.”

We get so adamant about the truth we feel we see, that we forget the truth that LOVE – civility- gentleness – are even *more* important. We've just read a few verses that say so. And if we really knew the Bible well, that gentle civility is what it emphasizes. So we need to know the truth, and believe and teach the truth – but let's not forget to be loving and gentle about it. I'm preaching to myself very much in this sermon as I've often been strident, adamant, and forceful myself about doctrinal beliefs I have.

We can firmly believe in what we have come to believe without destroying people who don't believe as we do. Pause for a second and consider your own approach to doctrine. Have you become so fierce about your beliefs that relationships have been lost? We'll read more about that in a few minutes. *You can believe what you believe about almost anything without destroying those who don't see it the way you do.*

The strongest sermon you or I will ever preach, will be a godly example, the light from our own lives. The example we set. The inspiring loving qualities people see in us will draw them faster to Christ than our strong words and fierce rebukes at their false doctrine (“false” according to our beliefs at least) ever will. Again, I stand rebuked at my own words here. This is something I admit I have to grow far more in as well.

Now let's move on to learning even more about the way to deal with doctrinal error.

When there's doctrinal error... HOW should we handle it? What should we do?

So what do we do when someone isn't preaching something right? Do we just let it be? Do we let them stay in their error? Now as we'll soon see, there are clearly some beliefs and teachings that are crucial even to salvation – like having faith that Yeshua was the Son of God and that he was resurrected from the dead – and there are less crucial doctrines that we can agree to disagree on, as we shall now see.

James 5:19-20

“Brethren, if anyone among you **wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back**, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

Now back in Ephesus there came a great preacher named **Apollos** – a good non-pagan name, eh? I jest. So a married couple among the early converts – Aquila and Priscilla – went to hear him, but Apollos didn’t understand about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So what did **Aquila and Priscilla** do? Quit meeting with him? Did they write letters smearing him? Did they start a website listing all his errors? What we’ll read is very instructive.

Acts 18:24-28

“Now a certain Jew named **Apollos**, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. 27 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; 28 for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.”

And then later, in the first verses of **Acts 19:1-8** we see Paul having to re-baptize some that had been taught by Apollos but had not yet learned of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So there were some differences in style and even substance between Paul and Apollos, but Paul said “I planted, and Apollos watered, and GOD gave the increase.” Both of those men decried the party spirit – the “I am of Paul” or “I am of Apollos” attitudes that came of all that. *See 1 Corinthians 1:9-14 if you’re not familiar with that.* They worked together. It was the brethren, in this case, who made issues of some of the differences.

Let’s look at how Yeshua himself handled a doctrinal difference – back to the woman at the well in Samaria, John 4. We read it earlier. She was going to stand her ground and say Mt. Gerizim and its temple were more important than Jerusalem. Yeshua sidestepped the issue and basically said – “It’s really not either. If we you look at it spiritually, God just wants to be worshipped in spirit and truth – no matter where you are! Neither on this mountain, or in Jerusalem worship the Father”. By extension, he would add today – “Don’t try to box in Abba, God most High, don’t box him in by thinking he’s only present in this or that group or your group!”

My point is: Yeshua didn’t get into a long drug-out fight with her. She was won over by his approach. That’s something many of us, me included, can learn a lot from, when there are doctrinal differences. Sometimes it gets to the point of name calling and ridiculing – which serves no one and nothing well and is not a godly way to handle it.

I’ll cover this part in more detail if time allows – but let me say this:

- Paul -- in some cases, though not in all doctrinal cases -- more strongly dealt with **the WAY people were handling differences** of doctrinal belief **more than the doctrinal error itself**. I'm having to learn this better myself.

HOW we handle doctrinal error can become even more important than the error itself, at least for some kinds of doctrines as you will shortly see. Read that again. I can't stress this enough.

Throughout Romans, we read of various doctrinal disputes about the law, but they were the beloved saints in Rome nonetheless (**Romans 1:7** – beloved of God, called saints...). Paul definitely spent many chapters **explaining salvation by faith in Christ** and how that faith in him *results in his obedient life being lived again in us*. And that life will be a changed, obedient life, for those who walk after the flesh will die – clearly stated in Romans 8 and throughout. But he emphasized that our salvation is by faith and grace, not of our own works. *Our salvation is proven by a changed/changing life of obedience, not caused by it. Otherwise it's no longer grace. So that is a doctrine of salvational importance and he spends most of his entire epistle on it.*

Some also believed they **could not eat meat**. **Paul did not correct that false doctrine but corrected the RESPONSE of those who disassociated themselves** from those who would not eat meat. *PONDER THAT. Let's read how Paul addresses this doctrinal issue. He does NOT spend a lot of time proving it's OK to eat meat. It simply was NOT that important, to Paul. Now other things were, and he did explain other more important things. But notice how he handled issues of food doctrinal differences.*

We can learn when to make an issue of doctrine, and when not to, in other words.

Romans 14:15-23

"If your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

19 Therefore let us **pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.** 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 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. 22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; **for whatever is not from faith is sin.**"

In the end, something can be perfectly alright and still be a sin if you don't BELIEVE it is right and still do it. It's important we keep our consciences clean.

But remember we're all at different levels of understanding and God is OK with that. Some "see" some doctrinal issues and others will later, and might not see those things right now – yet! It doesn't necessarily mean God isn't working with them or that they don't have His Spirit!

But we don't separate or fight over this kind of disagreement – things that have to do with FOOD. You don't quit fellowshiping with someone who doesn't study food labels as carefully as you do! That's not what the kingdom of God is all about!

Let's look at another example.

The Acts 15 Conference stated clearly that Gentiles should not eat meat offered to idols (**Acts 15:29**). But sometimes our beliefs get refined over time and situations we're in. By the time we get to Paul in 1 Corinthians 8 – he's saying "what's an idol? It's just wood or stone. So what?" And by that point, he's saying he could eat meat offered to an idol but would never do so if it would offend someone.

Please study all 13 verses of 1 Cor 8 on your own carefully. It's very instructive of how to act when we see wrong doctrine. Remember Christ's example when speaking to "lay" individuals. **Now Christ was tougher and stronger, however, to the teachers of the law who should have known better (Matthew 23, etc).** Teachers get a tougher judgment (James 3:1). So be careful about wanting to be a teacher (and I preach to myself!).

He says in **1 Cor 8:8** that food does not commend us to God whether we eat or don't eat. **THAT'S NOT WHAT** is most IMPORTANT, Paul is saying. And yet I know lots of people who put more time and effort into preaching that *their main beliefs include* no pork, no shrimp, no crab, no TRACE of any of it – so beware even what those French fries were fried in, or what might be in your chewing gum (those people say).

But remember: the kingdom of God is not in food and drink. (Romans 14:17). Whether you eat or not, food does not commend you to God. **1 Cor 8:8.** *The WAY of God is NOT mostly about being unporked. It's not. Sure, I don't eat pork or crab either. But it's not the first thing I put out there. My first messages were about the true GOSPEL, the HIGH Calling we have, the divine mystery revealed in Christ and the church and so on.*

The entire 13 verses of I Corinthians 8 is very instructive about how we can be at different levels of understanding. We can be at different levels of conscience. The stronger ones must bear with those who have not reached that level of understanding yet. But there shouldn't be a fight over it when it's NOT about "salvational" issues.

THE PROFOUND LESSON OF THE CHURCHES OF REVELATION 2-3

Remember this: read Revelation 1-2-3. Christ is seen as standing in the midst of HIS 7 church congregations (**Revelation 1:13; 2:1**) They're HIS church. All seven. And yet he says to Pergamos – "You have these horrible doctrines of the Nicolaitans and doctrines of Balaam, which I hate" (**Rev 2:14-16**). And you Thyatira, you allow a modern-day Jezebel false prophetess in your midst. . . . **but folks, they were STILL being given time and space to repent, and up to a point they were still – according to Yeshua – HIS ekklesia even with all that going on.**

Now ponder that one. That should make us all think. What Yeshua says and does in Revelation 2 is profound. So who are WE to say a person or church group is not being considered the “people of God” just because they don’t have everything perfectly right (yet), as they should (according to you and your understanding of scripture). Maybe Christ gives more time and space than we do? **Are you going to be more righteous than Yeshua?** He gave them SPACE to repent. Those who would not – HE would punish. But that’s HIS job. In the meantime, HE still calls them HIS CHURCH.

And perhaps if we hadn’t attacked them so vehemently, they might have come to see their error as led by God’s spirit. Know when to speak strongly and know when to consider how we deal with doctrinal error. Here are the scriptures I just cited.

Revelation 2:14-16 TO THE CHURCH in Pergamos

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who **hold the doctrine of Balaam**, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold **the doctrine of the Nicolaitans**, which thing I hate. 16 **Repent**, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”

Revelation 2:20-26 to Thyatira

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you **allow that woman Jezebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 **And I gave her time to repent** of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, *unless they repent* of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. 24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations”

So here were people and church groups with false doctrine – but whom Yeshua still said were part of HIS ekklesia, and whom HE was urging to repent. BUT...they were still ... His people up to a point. I think that is very instructive. *Don’t be more righteous than God.*

So the true congregation/*ekklesia* can have some in its midst who have incomplete knowledge or even teaching wrong things – but as they are shown the truth they have to quit the error, and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

The spirit of TRUTH will LEAD us into all truth – **John 16:13**. It’s a work in progress! The church is to work together UNTIL they reach the unity of the faith – **Ephesians 4:13**

Here are SOME AREAS WE CAN “AGREE TO DISAGREE”, IF people can do without being divisive. The pastor should teach the word of God however on all the issues below, as he best sees it, without becoming a policeman of everyone’s relationship with God.

THE PRINCIPLE I try more and more to live by is that each person's salvation is between him/her and God. I will accommodate each one's beliefs – based on what Paul said, “if meat offends, then I'll never eat meat again”, at least around that person (1 Cor 8:13). It's OK to eat meat. But Paul would not make a big issue of it.

So after all that in 1 Cor 8 – Paul says this in 1 Cor 9

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

For though I am free from all men, **I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew**, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), **that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak.** I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Do we see Paul's focus: it was winning people over! Give them time and space to learn what you know. Don't become obnoxious about the truths you see.

Paul even took a Nazarite vow temporarily and even sacrificed in the temple, even when it was no longer necessary – as he made himself a Jew to win the Jews.

So if my wife and I are visiting a sabbath-keeping church that has the men on one side and the women on another, I sit with the men and don't make an issue of it; and my wife sits with the women's side. But don't DIVIDE or quit meeting over things like this. If they want women to wear a head covering (other than their long hair), then my wife will, just so we don't offend. Otherwise how do you live with what Paul teaches in 1 Cor 9:19-23?

I will say “Yahweh” to Hebrew Roots people, and “Jesus” to people who have not yet come to see that, or even as I often do here – says “Yeshua, or Jesus” so people start to hear his Hebrew name. But I get attacked for even doing that by those on side of the issue.

Here are a FEW examples out of probably THOUSANDS that I could cite that have caused separation and division:

- **The correct holydays calendar to use.** Let people who have studied it, keep God's holydays on the dates they feel they should. Some like the Rabbinic calendar, some do not like having any of the Postponements in the calendar. Let each be decided *but don't divide over that*. If someone causes trouble over this or any other doctrinal divide, however, that's a different matter. That's when we DO separate.
- **What we each do on the sabbath.** That's between you and God. I will preach it as I understand it, but what YOU do, is between you and YHVH. I don't buy meals out on the sabbath, but neither am I going to scream at people who do, in my sermons.
- Whether we say **Father, or Abba, or Jesus, or Yeshua, or the Lord or YHVH** – I have my definite beliefs, but I won't quit fellowshiping with folks just because they don't see it my way.

- Whether you feel **tithing** is no longer required in the New Covenant or you do... that's between you and your God. It's not something to divide over. I tithe.
- **Vegetarian or meat eater. Wearing makeup or not. Women wearing a veil** in church services or believing their "veil" is their long hair (which is my belief)... we don't divide over that, and I'm sure my wife would even wear a veil in places where it might be seen as offensive if she did not.
- Wearing tzit-zit (Tassels) or not. I've worn them in places where it might cause offense if I didn't. Using prayer books or not (I prefer not to; to speak my heart, rather than someone else's words). But if someone does not wear tzit-zit, those of you who do should not castigate or look down your nose at him either.
- Which **translation of the Bible** you prefer to use. KJV, NKJV, NIV, etc. Of course the way a verse is translated can SPAWN the very debate! Many of the early reformers and early Puritans used the Geneva Bible – and became the foundation of many of our constitutional beliefs in America. Later King James wanted everyone using his version authorized by the king (he removed the marginal commentaries that limited the king's power). But is KJV perfect? See my blog on this matter.
- **Women's role in services.** Some places won't even let women usher, or help out in any public way at all. I will honor what those people believe when I meet with them but I have my convictions too. (*Hear my sermons about Women in the Church in January-March 2005 on this website*).
- **What you wear in church services.** I see no scripture that requires suit and tie or white shirts, but that is the requirement in some places. In those places I will choose not to offend and I will wear a suit and tie and white shirt. But on my own, I do not subscribe to that kind of regulating. **I think what God requires is to come in a CLEAN garment as his children before Him.** We should all come in clean clothes (Exodus 19) not stained T-shirts and dirty pants or dresses. That shows profound disrespect for God. But It makes NO sense to me for people in hot and humid climates especially like Kenya or the Philippines to have to wear a warm coat jacket – plus some people simply could not afford it anyway. But I don't divide over that.

Now if someone is coming to services in a microskirt and showing a lot of leg and cleavage, if she continues after 2-3 visits and isn't "picking up" on the fact the other women aren't dressed like that, I might have an older woman speak with her. And why would a woman not want to obey the Bible's commands to be modest and not to cause offense (such as arousing lust in a man's heart)?

- **Hair length.** 1 Cor. 11:14-15. I will teach what scripture says about men's hair should be short and women's hair long, *but scripture does not define "short" and "long"* -- but you get the idea. The kingdom's message is not so much about hair length, folks. SO unless someone is observing a Nazarite vow, and Jesus was NOT a long-haired Nazarite. He was not – so unless a man is in a Nazarite vow, he should have short hair. If you claim a Nazarite vow, then you can't drink wine or cut your

hair or touch a dead body (Numbers 6:1-8). Yeshua touched dead bodies and certainly drank wine. But hair length is not something to separate over.

Now I personally still will accept that God could be working with ANYONE, at ANY time, even without the evidence yet of the Spirit working. (Corinth – “I have many people here” Acts 18). So I don’t condemn people with different beliefs than mine.

- I personally choose to worship with 7th day sabbath keepers, as that is my belief and I believe it is a central big belief. However, I do not decide for God that somehow He is working solely with those who presently keep the sabbath. He starts working with people long before we humans are even aware of it. **Sermons – Jan – March 2008, on the true sabbath.**
- I choose to worship with people who do not keep the pagan holidays like Easter and Christmas. It’s up to God to show them the truth on these things when HE wants. I preach the truth on these subjects. Search my website for True Sabbath series.
- I personally choose not to support or meet with pastors who spend their time screaming about other pastors, or other churches, or spending a lot of time in their sermons on political issues or screaming about the President or what not. WHY should we want to hear all that? We should be preaching the WORD – and preach all of it. There’s so much to cover.

But having said that, I want to remember not to major in the minors.

The major beliefs are love for God and man – not skirt length or long hair or whether we wear a coat and tie or not. The major is the good news of the coming kingdom of God made possible by the cross of Yeshua! The “major” is that God is calling sinners and we’re all at different stages of development and let’s encourage one another; don’t divide – UNLESS – it is on what I call a “salvational issue”.

EXAMPLES OF SALVATIONAL ISSUES and when we SHOULD separate

Scripture also definitely teaches us there are times to separate. There ARE salvational beliefs that SHOULD keep us from meeting with these folks:

- **The teaching of who Jesus (Yeshua) is salvational.**

2 John 7-11

“Many deceivers have gone out into the world; they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch yourselves so that you don’t lose what we have worked for, but you may receive a full reward. 9 Anyone who does not remain in the teaching about (of) Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God. The one who remains in that teaching, this one has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, and don’t say, “Welcome,” to him; 11 for the one who says, “Welcome,” to him shares in his evil works.”

To me, I will fellowship and worship with people who believe that God the Father is supreme and that He is God Most High. That He sent the Word to come as His Son – so his one life could pay for the sins of all humanity, and that Yeshua was also God with God (as John explains in John 1:1-3), and that this could be why “God” is from the PLURAL word “Elohim” throughout the Old Testament/Tanakh.

- **THE TEACHING OF THE NATURE OF GOD IS SALVATIONAL to me. IS GOD A TRINITY?** This is a foundational concept to accept or reject. God in 3 persons, or is God something else? I definitely believe there is God the Father, and Yeshua the Son of God and they act as ONE, are seen as ONE because Yeshua seeks to do his Father’s will perfectly. I also believe there is the Holy Spirit.

Is the Holy Spirit a PERSON, A personality, co-equal with God? **The trinity teaches God in 3 persons who are all three equal.**

Are they equal in power and authority? But my reading of Scripture is clear to me at least that God the Father is definitely “God Most High”, higher than Yeshua. Yeshua is not equal in authority or function to His Father, but was SENT by His father. The trinity says the Father and Son are co-equal. Yeshua, even after the resurrection, refers to God the Father as greater than He and Yeshua will be under the Father’s command (1 Cor. 15:25-28). Scripture even shows us that Yeshua calls God the Father his GOD (John 20:17; Ephesians 1:3,17; Revelation 1:5-6; Hebrews 1:8-9 and many more). That’s not co-equal. I know Philippians 2 mentions equality but use ALL the scriptures on a topic.

- **We separate when people cause division and offenses because of the WAY they are handling doctrinal differences of opinion. It’s not so much the difference here as it *is the way it is being handled!*** I’ve gone too far at times myself, and am learning to realize there are times to hold your tongue and don’t cause division – and there are times to speak up for the defense of TRUTH.

Romans 16:17-19

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Even in the Jerusalem Council though (Acts 15:7), when there’s a strong discussion going on, tempers can rise. It speaks of dispute, debate, discussion going on depending on which translation you use.

But even someone causing divisions and offenses should first be cautioned and warned and not just immediately kicked out. His explanation may even be correct, but if it is done in an overly combative way, then it becomes a problem. Again, many of us have to learn this balance, even I do. Remember how

Titus 3:10-11

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”

- ***We separate from baptized brethren who insist on living presently in an ongoing, intentional life of sin.***

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

"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.

12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

THIS IS NOT saying you should FOREVER stay away from brethren who some time ago did some pretty serious sin. Haven't we all, if truth be known? Paul in **2 Corinthians 2:3-11** and later in 2 Cor 7 where Paul discusses the repentance of the church — he says to be sure to welcome back the brother who had repented of such serious sins. If we think otherwise, you'll have to forever bar yourself ever accepting King David or Samson or just about anyone — even Abraham. He did some pretty rotten things too like throwing his wife "under the bus" a couple times! Plus remember Yeshua said to the woman caught in the act of adultery: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8).

Don't be more righteous than Christ. Don't impose a higher standard than he did.

But back to doctrine: Paul didn't order ministers to disfellowship those brethren teaching the resurrection was past, or that there was no resurrection (1 Cor 15:12-19). No, he explained the truth on that. That's where we always start.

So I don't assume I have all doctrine complete or correct, and perhaps I can learn from others — and I hope they will meet with me too. I hope you won't assume you know it all either. Be willing to learn from others. Be willing to hear them out.

Seek first to understand, before you seek to be understood — especially when it comes to doctrine.

We need to wrap up.

- All CORRECT doctrine comes from God the Father through Jesus Christ and we learn it from the word of God, not anywhere else.
- Doctrine is important. Our Father wants to be worshipped in truth. There are key salvational issues that we must not compromise on. But many doctrinal differences are not salvational issues and on those, we agree to disagree.
- We DO separate from people who claim to be believers who *practice* a life of open and intentional sin. We also separate from people who are very divisive — and we need to learn to deal with issues without being so divisive and opinionated ourselves.
- Remember the issue of food in Romans 14 and 1 Cor. 8. So on some issues we live and let live. We live with those. As Paul said, we become a Jew to a Jew, as one

under the law to someone under the law, and so on – to be better able to win people over to Christ. It would help a lot if we could learn to listen first, to understand the other side first – before we seek to make them understand us.

“Seek first to understand, before you seek to be understood.”

- We remember that the churches of Rev 2-3 were all still churches that Yeshua says are HIS church. But they were loaded with problems and doctrinal error. Yes, they would have to repent. That’s true – but in the meantime, he was giving them space and called them his people.
- **Remember that more important than winning the doctrinal arguments is learning to work with these situations with civility and grace, as Christ did at the well, as Aquila and Priscilla did, as Paul did and taught especially in 1 Cor 8 and Romans 14.**

I hope this has helped. I hope this will steer some of you away from extra-Biblical sources for your truth and beliefs. I hope this help you be more accepting of people with beliefs that may not be just like yours in every point – unless they’re salvational issues. But even then, you can be civil and gracious and be the light of God’s word for them. I hope this will help bring more of God’s children together – for if you’re not gathering, you’re scattering, Yeshua said. (Luke 11:23).

May Yahweh bless you in your attempts to find the balanced way of using doctrine – the true teachings of the Way of the Kingdom.

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If this message has made you think or even repent – feel free to tell others about our website. www.Lightontherock.org Thank you. Don’t keep us a secret.