

BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP

By George Booker

PREFACE

This writer, with the uninhibited zeal of youth, felt for a number of years that he knew all that was worth knowing about “fellowship”. But changing circumstances provoked a serious and prolonged re-examination of the foundations of his “pure fellowship” position, and he was led at last to conclude that there is a “better way” consistent with the commandments of Christ. He now holds a different understanding of “fellowship”, with not quite the certainty of earlier times, but rather what he believes is a more realistic awareness of the imperfection of all things human (including this book!).

Some of the results of those studies are now offered to the brotherhood, with the prayer that they might somehow encourage brethren of all “fellowships” to embrace the true “purity” that is never distinct from “peace”. May the Lord when he returns find his disciples endeavoring, in all humility, to keep the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Certain chapters in this study were first published as articles in *The Christadelphian*, *The Testimony*, *The Logos*, and *The Tidings*. They are now somewhat modified for inclusion here.

I wish to express my gratitude to the many brethren whose thoughts and expositions appear herein. I have tried always to give references, so that verification and further study may be possible. (In this connection, the student should find useful the index of quotations from Christadelphian writings, located at the end of this book.)

Several articles are worthy of special citation:

1. Robert Roberts: “True Principles and Uncertain Details; or, The Danger of Going Too Far in our Demands on Fellow-Believers”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 35, No. 407 (May 1898), pp. 182-189. This article has been reprinted at least twice in the same magazine: by C.C. Walker (Vol. 60, No. 708 — June 1923, pp. 248-256) and by John Carter (Vol. 92, No. 1097 — Nov. 1955, pp. 414-418).
2. Robert Roberts: *A Guide to the Formation and Conduct of Christadelphian Ecclesias* (commonly referred to as *The Ecclesial Guide*), published in several editions. Of particular relevance are Sections 32 and 36 through 42.
3. Islip Collyer: At least four articles are extremely important:
 - a. *An Appeal to Christadelphians*, published in booklet form by the *Christadelphia Newsletter*.
 - b. “True Principles Governing Fellowship”, *The Christadelphian* Vol. 61, No. 721 (July 1924), pp. 294-299.
 - c. “The Scriptural Principles Governing Controversy”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 61, No. 722 (Aug. 1924), pp. 342-345. These last two articles are also reproduced in the book *Principles and Proverbs*.
 - d. “A Pure Fellowship”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 68, No. 807 (Sept. 1931), pp. 408-410. This article was reprinted in Vol. 95, No. 1128 (June 1958), pp. 258-260.
4. Alan Eyre: “Problems of Fellowship in the First Century Ecclesia”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 108, 1971. This is a series of five articles commencing in the January issue.
5. The Committee of *The Christadelphian*: “Fellowship: Its Spirit and Practice”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 109, No. 1291 (Jan. 1972), pp. 7-13. This is also available separately in pamphlet form from The Office of *The Christadelphian*.
6. H.A. Whittaker: “Block Disfellowship: Is It Taught in the Bible?”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 43, No. 512 (Aug. 1973), pp. 310-313, and No. 513 (Sept. 1973), pp. 340-345.

The above articles, as well as all the others cited in the body of this book, should be read in their entirety if possible.

In truth, however, we must realize there is only one authority in spiritual matters; it is only insofar as the writings of brethren illuminate the principles of God's Word that they are useful. Otherwise, they may become a snare; today, we are confronted with a sad spectacle: We see almost a dozen mutually exclusive "pure" fellowships, each appealing to the names of the same "pioneer" brethren almost as though they were inspired prophets. Thus they seek to justify their separation from the other eleven "groups", but especially from the "Central" or "Reunion" Fellowship.

In arbitrarily choosing the Scriptures to be emphasized in any study, the writer leaves himself open to the criticism of being less than objective. This charge may be inescapable in a subject as volatile as "fellowship". How does one walk the "tightrope" between an intolerable leniency on the one hand, and the vehement censure of any and every deviation on the other — a habit that has become all too common among us? I ask you, the reader, to give due weight to every relevant passage, and balance all arguments according to their Biblical evidence. Perhaps if we approach the Word of God as we should, humbly, prayerfully — and with just a hint of godly fear — then we will achieve that balanced approach where justice *and* mercy, goodness *and* severity, patience *and* action walk hand in hand.

I have attempted to consider, as far as possible, only the Scriptural aspects of "fellowship", and not the circumstances of the many previous divisions. These would themselves constitute material for a sizeable volume, but in my estimation this would not be nearly so profitable a study. No "fellowship" of today is precisely what it once was. And experience shows us the impossibility of judging perfectly even present-day situations. How much less can we be certain of all our "facts" (i.e., motives and circumstances) in a 50- or 100-year-old controversy? It is next to impossible to know the circumstances as they truly existed at the time of these divisions, or the minds of the brethren involved. Therefore, it would be very difficult for us to make an unbiased judgment as to the particular fellowship issues as they may have existed in their days. A little more Christadelphian humility in such matters might very well be the wisest course for all of us.

What *does* require further investigation is the very concept of "first principles": What precisely *are* "first principles"? And how can they be *Biblically* determined? These are important questions because, no matter how well Biblical principles of fellowship may be understood, there is still the matter of where and how they should be applied. And being able to draw clearly defined and consistent lines between first principles and matters of lesser importance is crucial in this process. It is my hope to deal with these important but difficult matters in a further work — to be published, God willing, within the next year or so.

It is to the Bible that we turn, then, to determine the responsibilities of true "fellowship", both individual and ecclesial, in our present-day circumstances. And yet is not "fellowship" distinctly more than a mere responsibility?

"Truly our *fellowship* is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write unto you, *that your joy may be full*" (1 John 1:3,4).

George Booker

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PRELIMINARY POINTS

Our inquiries into this subject must of necessity be rooted and grounded in love — love of God and His most holy commandments, and also love for our brethren. This subject, above all others, is filled with hidden perils; at every step, we must openly and honestly examine our motives: Does personal animosity or personal preference affect our decisions? Are we being honest with our Father in Heaven, Who discerns even the intents of our hearts? Are we being truly sympathetic and considerate of our brethren "for whom Christ died"? Where do pride and stubbornness fit into the picture?

One theme emerging from our study is this: New Testament disfellowship (or withdrawal) was *always* intended to lead to the reclamation of the offender. The break in unity was *always* viewed as temporary, and the New Testament ideal was realized in the ecclesia striving to win back the erring brother. It follows, then, that disfellowship — now matter how carefully performed according to the letter of Matthew 18 — is unscriptural if not followed by a campaign for recovery and reunion just as painstaking and strenuous.

In our studies as they unfold we note also the inherent conflict of majority versus unanimity. In brief, must all members of an ecclesia (or group of ecclesias) concur with *every* action of the ecclesia involving "fellowship"? Must the dissenter from the ecclesial action also be dealt with in the same fashion as was the original offender? What about silence? Is it to be

construed as consent or dissent? And, finally, how should the very real elements of distance and time affect our “fellowship” decisions? It may be beyond the ability of *any* brother to give full and satisfying answers to such questions. But, on the other hand, to ignore or bypass the difficulties is hardly honest. All we can hope to do is offer a little help in the unraveling of such complexities.

Robert Roberts has made a statement that is quite relevant to our study:

“It is possible to go too far in our demands on fellow-believers. How far we ought to go and where to stop, is at one time or other a perplexing problem to most earnest minds....” (“True Principles and Uncertain Details”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 92, No. 1097 — Nov. 1955 — p. 414).

We should at least be aware that this *is* a “perplexing problem”! We should often come back to this question: Is it more dangerous to be too lenient than to be too strict? The philosophy of some brethren would seem to be: ‘Give the Lord the benefit of the doubt, and *cut the doubtful one off!*’ Such brethren consider themselves to be ‘on the safe side’, but are they? It is to the Bible that we must go to find an answer.

THE SCRIPTURAL CASE

1. Fellowship — KOINONIA: A Word Study

The word *koinonia* occurs about twenty times in the New Testament. It can refer to (a) sharing one’s goods or wealth with those in need, and may then be translated “contribution”, or “distribution”, or “to communicate”; (b) participation in a common life of faith, which would include the Breaking of Bread; (c) association with the Lord Jesus Christ (which would also include the Breaking of Bread) and with his Father (The Committee of *The Christadelphian*, “Fellowship: Its Spirit and Practice”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 109, No. 1291 — Jan. 1972 — p. 13).

Following is a summary of the passages where *koinonia* occurs:

A. Sharing one’s goods:

- “To make a certain *contribution* for poor saints” (Rom. 15:26).
- “*Fellowship* (‘joint participation’: Diag.) of the ministering to saints” (2 Cor. 8:4).
- “They glorify God.... for your liberal *distribution* unto them” (2 Cor. 9:13).
- “But to do good and to *communicate* forget not” (Heb. 13:16).

B. Participation in a common life of faith:

- “They continued in the apostles’ doctrine and *fellowship*, and breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). (This shows that, though “fellowship” may include joint participation in the emblems of Christ’s death, it is not confined to that one activity.)
- “The right hand of *fellowship*” (Gal. 2:9). (A partnership of preaching the gospel.)
- “For your *fellowship* in the gospel...(I thank God)...” (Phil. 1:5).
- “*Fellowship* of the Spirit” (Phil. 2:1).
- “For your *fellowship* is with the Father and his Son.... if we walk in the light....we have *fellowship* one with another” (1 John 1:3,7).

C. Association with Christ and his Father:

- “By whom (God) ye were called unto *fellowship* of his Son” (1 Cor. 1:9).
- “The cup..... *communion* of the blood of Christ; the bread....*communion* of the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 10:16).
- “What *communion* hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14).
- “The *communion* of the Holy Spirit be with you” (2 Cor. 13:14).
- “The *fellowship* of the mystery” (Eph. 3:9). (The shared effort in preaching to the Gentiles.)
- “*Fellowship* of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10).
- “Our *fellowship* is with the Father and his Son.... If we say we have *fellowship* with him, and walk in darkness, we lie....” (1 John 1:3,6).

There is a related verb, *koinoneo*, that is used in similar ways: (a) of giving to those in need, (b) of the relationship between fellow-believers, and (c) of association with our Lord; though we have also here a negative use: (d) of having association with forbidden deeds or doctrines, against which the saints are warned.

Again, the relevant passages are as follows:

A. Giving to those in need:

- “*Distributing* to the necessity of the saints” (Rom. 12:13).
- “If the Gentiles *have been partakers* of their spiritual things.... (they should) minister in carnal things” (Rom. 15:27).
- “Let him that is taught in the word *communicate* unto him that teacheth” (Gal. 6:6).
- “No church *communicated* with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only” (Phil. 4:15).

B. The relationship between believers:

- Romans 15:27 again.

C. Association with our Lord:

- “The children *are partakers* of flesh and blood...(and) he (Jesus) also...” (Heb. 2:14).
- “Rejoice.... inasmuch as ye *are partakers* of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pet. 4:13).

D. Association with forbidden deeds and doctrines:

- “Neither *be partakers* of other men’s sins” (1 Tim. 5:22).
- “For he that biddeth him God speed *is partaker* of his evil deeds” (2 John 11).
- “What *communion* hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). (This word is *koinonia* again, as above, but the implication is as the last two quotations.)

As a summary of the use of these two words in the New Testament, we may remark:

1. They are used in the *positive* sense, to be shared, 25 times; and in the *negative* sense, to be withheld, only 3 times — which should certainly give us a hint as to which is most important!
2. Fellowship is with the Father and Son 10 times; and with one another only 6 times. (Even here, however, we may have fellowship with one another *only because* we have been called together out of the world *by God*.) Fellowship is His to bestow, not ours. We share “fellowship” with our brethren, certainly — but we share what we have each received as a gift, and not what we have each earned!

Scriptural fellowship — as we have seen — is joy: for us, the joy of mortal men and women in *sharing* common knowledge and purpose with the Eternal Father and with His Son, to whom He has committed all power and authority:

“Truly our *fellowship* is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your *joy* may be full” (1 John 1:3,4).

“As Paul writes to the Corinthians, we have been called unto the *fellowship* of Jesus Christ our Lord. In him we have a friend who never fails, a companion who never tires, who fills our moments of prayer and meditation with strength and comfort and hope, who answers our spiritual seeking with fresh insight, new vision, and deepening peace. For as we, with the same insatiable thirst as the psalmist, reach out for God, in sky and sea and earth, and long for the deep inner peace, which is His gift, He meets our uplifted eyes and upraised spirits. For, ‘In thy light shall we see light’, and share it in the living *fellowship* of His family” (S. Harris, “A True Fellowship”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 106, No. 1261 — July 1969 — p. 309).

2. Paul’s Reaction to Error (1 Corinthians)

In a broad view of the brotherhood in the first century, one point becomes very clear. Newly baptized brethren and even entire ecclesias in the formative stage were treated by the apostles with a great deal more patience and sympathy than is

customary in these days. Even extreme errors and gross misconduct were the subject of careful explanation and entreaty, not broad and summary excommunication.

The best example of this is the Corinthian ecclesia, which seemed to lack a comprehensive grasp of one of the greatest of first principles — the resurrection (1 Cor. 15)! Can we imagine the reaction of many Christadelphians today? ‘Why, these people are obviously not in the Truth at all! How can we have anything to do with *them*?’

In contrast to this attitude, the apostle Paul strives mightily and tirelessly to reclaim those who have been misled — while at the same time strenuously repudiating the false doctrine. Obviously, as far as he was concerned, these Corinthians were *brethren*. Admittedly, they were brethren who very much needed assistance, but they were brethren nevertheless.

In a similar vein are Paul’s words to his Galatian brethren, who were sorely beset by error:

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?” (Gal. 3:1).

Paul does not consider the false teachers and those brethren who are falsely taught to be in the same category. He bluntly exposes the wrong, attempts to isolate the perpetrator of the wrong, but still patiently and lovingly instructs the ones who are misled. This is a theme which will recur time after time in this survey, and it would be well to watch for it.

“An important distinction is made — between the urgent need to disfellowship the circumcisers and their advocates and the treatment urged upon those Galatians who may have been gullibly led astray: ‘Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, *you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.*’ They were to remember that self-examination, not self-conceit, is required of all who would thus assume the role of ecclesial monitors and shepherds. Such are not free from temptation themselves! (Gal. 6:3)” (A. Eyre, “Problems of Fellowship in the First Century Ecclesia”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 108, No. 1281 — March 1971 — p. 106).

It must not be contended from such passages that we (either as individuals or ecclesias) are at liberty to *overlook* error when we encounter it. And yet an enlightened view of the first-century ecclesias as presented in the New Testament must encourage a substantial measure of restraint in our actions. Perhaps there is less reason for patience and latitude today (it may be argued), since Christadelphian doctrines and practices are so solidly established. Yet human nature never changes, some brethren will always develop slowly or erratically or not at all, and some ecclesias will always be in formative or turbulent periods. Consequently, those who are most firmly grounded in the Truth will always be building, always desiring maturity (yes, even perfection) for themselves and their brethren, but never quite attaining it. And so it must be until Christ returns.

Again, with regard to the Corinthians, Brother Roberts adds:

“There were men among the Corinthian brethren who denied the resurrection; did Paul charge the [other] brethren with complicity with that heresy because of the presence of such among them? Doubtless their rejection of the resurrection nullified *their* claims for that place [i.e. among the brethren], *but still it did not make the true brethren guilty of their false doctrine while merely tolerating it, pending an appeal to Paul*” (“True Principles and Uncertain Details”, p. 417).

Some of the other above-mentioned examples of error and misconduct in the first-century ecclesias are listed below:

1. There is no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12; 2 Tim. 2:18).
2. Suing at law (1 Cor. 6:1,6).
3. Fornication, incest (1 Cor. 5:1).
4. Drunkenness at the “love feast” (1 Cor. 11:21).
5. Women speaking (teaching) in the ecclesia (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11).
6. The Great Heresy: “Circumcision is essential to salvation”, or (in its milder form) at least preferable (Acts 15:1; Galatians, esp. 2:12,13).
7. Jesus was merely a man, and not the Son of God (1 John 2:22; Luke 1:35).
8. Jesus was “God”, not man (1 John 4:2,3).

We notice that in latter times Nos. 2 and 3 have, on a local level, been the cause of many ecclesial problems; and that No. 5 has been the basis for numerous local problems. Also, that the questions of the precise nature of Christ (Nos. 7 and 8) and details about resurrectional judgment (No. 1) continue to bother Christadelphians.

But also, the “Great Heresy” of the first century (No. 6) is quite interesting, in that it practically reproduces the “fellowship” viewpoint of some groups of believers even today. If we simply substitute “cutting off doubtful brethren” in place of “cutting off the flesh” (in circumcision), the parallel becomes obvious. The unwarranted division is described as follows:

“Perhaps news of this (Peter’s reception of the Gentile Christians in Antioch) reached Jerusalem and encouraged the ‘ultra-conservatives’ to make investigations. Perhaps the death of Herod encouraged Judaeans brethren to go and fetch Peter back to Jerusalem. Whatever the reason, a disastrous visit was made by some ‘from James’.... These visitors to Antioch forced a division in the ecclesia *by demanding that circumcision be made a matter of fellowship.*

“We have very sparse details of the actual course of events, but there is no doubt that it took a very serious turn. Peter, challenged by those from his own ecclesia, afraid of conservative reaction and failing to face up to the implications of the vision in Joppa (Acts 10), crumbled under the attack of the Jerusalem bigots. *He ‘stood aside’ and withdrew his fellowship from his Gentile brethren.* The Jewish members of the Antioch ecclesia, faced with this lamentable lapse of one so prominent, had little alternative but to follow suit. Paul says they ‘acted insincerely’ (Gal. 2:13), the implication being that they viewed the division as being expedient, with fellowship to be resumed perhaps when Peter and the others had gone. Even Barnabas was carried away and met with the ‘circumcision fellowship’. *Perhaps it is something of a comfort in our own problems to know that for a time two great apostles were not in the same fellowship!*

“How the division was resolved we do not know, but resolved it must have been, for shortly afterwards an apparently united Antioch ecclesia sent Saul and Barnabas forth together on their first sponsored missionary journey. *Probably, Paul’s forthright yet sincere stand on the matter may have helped;* in any case, in God’s providence such a disastrous division was not to be” (A. Eyre, Vol. 108, No. 1280 — Feb. 1971 — p. 60).

And so, in the first century, there existed for a time a second or “elite” “fellowship”. No doubt, like similar associations today, it included the most radical — who urged that their peculiar viewpoint was *essential* to salvation — as well as the more moderate element. These moderate ones did not deny to the “others” the possibility of acceptance at the judgment seat, but merely wished to remain separate either for expedience’s sake or for fear of personal “contamination”. How little the ecclesial world has changed from that day to this!

3. The Good Shepherd and the Hireling (John 10)

“It is unfortunate that the chapter division dissociates the shepherd allegory from the discussion reported in chapter 9. Jesus had convicted the Pharisees of blindness and incompetence in dealing with the flock of God. As bad shepherds they had cast out the healed man, but the good shepherd had found him” (John Carter, *Gospel of John*, p. 119).

“And they cast him out. Jesus heard they had cast him out; and when he found him....” (John 9:34,35).

“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (6:37).

With bold actions and words, Christ dramatically set himself apart from the other teachers of his nation. They pompously dictated and threatened; he lovingly instructed and comforted. They “cast out”; he “found” and recovered. They “cared not for the sheep”; he “laid down his life for the sheep” (10:15), and in so doing became the model for all shepherds, overseers, and elders. Doubtless Peter had “the Good Shepherd” in mind when he wrote:

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

The true ecclesial shepherd, then, must do the works of his Master:

1. He must feed others first (Ezek. 34:2).
2. He must strengthen the diseased or weak (Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:4; Rom. 15:1).
3. He must bind up what is broken (Ezek. 34:4).

4. He must seek what is lost (Ezek. 34:4,11,16; Matt. 18:12; Luke 15:4-7).
5. He must assume a personal responsibility in the face of a threat.
6. And he must be prepared to protect the flock at all costs: "Take heed to *all* the flock....remember that I warned you" (Acts 20:28-31).

The characteristics of a true shepherd are set in contrast to those of a "hireling":

"But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth.... The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep" (John 10:12,13).

It is said of the hirelings or false shepherds that they "feed (or *shepherd*) themselves" (Ezek. 34:2).

"The shepherds shepherded themselves! They were prepared to sacrifice the flock for themselves, whereas they should have extended their self-sacrificing devotion to the flock and carefully pastured or shepherded it" (H.P. Mansfield, *Ezekiel's Prophecies of the Restoration*, p. 30).

"From these words one would think it transparently obvious that in time of danger to the flock from false teachers ('After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock' — Acts 20:29), a man's duty will keep him *with* the flock in order that he might exert every possible effort in defence of those less able than himself to combat spiritual evil. Yet in sharp contrast to this the attitude of some seems to be: 'There is a wolf in the flock. I have told the sheep to chase it away, but they do nothing of the sort. So now it is time for me to get out as quickly as I can.' The incisive word of the Lord for men who act in this way is the shameful term: 'hireling'.... Without doubt those who withdraw to an exclusive 'pure' fellowship are hirelings in the sense in which Jesus used the term, for their separatism is solely a means of furthering, as they think, their own safety and benefit" (H.A. Whittaker, "Block Disfellowship", *The Testimony*, Vol. 43, No. 513 — Sept. 1973 — p. 340).

A hireling *may* seek to benefit *materially* by his labors, and this of course is a serious offence (1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:3,8). But, as the Pharisees so amply demonstrated, one may be a "hireling" even if he cares not at all for financial profit. He may be a "hireling", for example, in caring for power and authority, or for honor and respect without responsibility. He may be a "hireling" if he abandons his flock when the "wolf" (or false teacher — Acts 20:29) approaches. He thus shows his true character when he saves himself first — subjecting his employer's "investment" to possible ruin. As members of the *one* Body, we should develop the mind-picture of ourselves as "partners" in the enterprise, not mere employees! The employee is nothing but "hired help", a "hireling" who works for his "wages" and nothing else (but the "gift" of God, which we hope one day to receive, is not "wages"; our proper "wages" can only be death — Rom. 6:23). The hireling is not — as he should be — a "partner" or a "partaker", who expects to participate (the significance of "fellowship") in the ultimate profits of the enterprise.

"The disciple of Christ who is worth his salt will not beat a hasty retreat, or even a reluctant retreat, at the signs of danger, but will persistently and courageously set himself to antagonize and expose every symptom of apostasy which may manifest itself in his own ecclesia" (*Ibid.*, p. 341).

In the *brotherhood*, therefore, the *brother* is best off when he cares first and foremost for the welfare of his *brethren*.

"Let any who are troubled by current contentions and worried by vague apprehensions as to their own responsibility for 'condoning' evil ponder these words of the Good Shepherd again and again. He calls men to be good shepherds after his own pattern, giving themselves in devoted service and care to the harassed flock, and even laying down their lives for the sheep. How strange that it does not seem to dawn on rigorous separatists that they testify for Truth against error far more efficiently by staying where the error is and witnessing against it than by *fleeing* to a 'holier than thou' sanctuary, from which to carry on a *campaign of scolding* across a great gulf which they themselves have fixed" (H. Whittaker, "False Teachers", *The Testimony*, Vol. 36, No. 426 — June 1966 — p. 212).

Is our salvation endangered by "fellowshipping" "doubtful cases"? Let the "shepherds" of the Bible — types, or patterns, every one of the "Great Shepherd" — give the answer:

1. Abraham — whose near kinsman Lot strives with him and then departs (Gen. 13:6-8) — nevertheless moves swiftly to save his ungrateful nephew from bondage (Gen. 14). Later he even intercedes for him with the Lord when his

life is threatened in Sodom (Gen. 18): Notice that his boldest approach to the Lord is to beg for the sparing of others (18:27,28), when it might reasonably be argued that they did not deserve to be spared.

2. Joseph — whose brothers plotted against him and would have taken his life — still found the love to forgive them and take them into his “fellowship” again when they were in great distress:

“Now therefore fear not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them” (Gen. 50:21).

3. Moses became the great intercessor for a nation that was obviously at fault. His fervent prayer needs no comment:

“Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin — and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written” (Exod. 32:32).

4. David, who always viewed Israel not as his kingdom but as his *flock*, wrote the words from his youthful experience which might well be termed “The Shepherd’s Manual” (Psalm 23). When he might easily have laid the blame for shortcoming upon a stiff-necked nation, and the sword of the angel was poised to continue their destruction, David the shepherd-king pleaded their “doubtful case”:

“Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but *these sheep*, what have *they* done? [He refuses to point out that they have done even worse!].... Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against *me*” (2 Sam. 24:17).

5. Daniel did not mind “fellowshipping” his “doubtful” brethren; he even went so far as to pray on their behalf, taking the sins of the nation upon his innocent shoulders:

“We have sinned,” he prayed, “and have committed iniquity neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord... therefore the curse is poured upon us....” (Dan. 9:5-15).

6. And Paul, the greatest of the shepherd-apostles, could wish that he were accursed for the sakes of his brethren the Jews (Rom. 9:1-3), *who were not even in Christ!* If this could be his attitude towards enemies of the Truth, how much more should we yearn for and seek unity and brotherhood with those whom we know to be in covenant-relationship with Christ?

“So there shall be *one* flock, and *one* shepherd” (John 10:16, RSV).

The day will soon come when before the Lord of all the earth will be gathered his flock (Matt. 25:31-46), his *one* flock — for they will then be treated as one, all the man-made barriers swept away. It is then that the true force of the King’s question will come home to each of us: ‘What have you done for *my* brethren? for *my* sheep?’ How confident would we feel to say the following?: ‘Lord, I did the best I could for a little while; but then I heard of a false doctrine somewhere or other, and I left as quickly as I could. After that I really don’t know what happened to them.’

4. The Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13)

This parable has caused much controversy among Christadelphian expositors. Some rather strange and disconnected interpretations have been put forth because the expositor “looked ahead” and sought to avoid an inevitable but unwelcome conclusion. Let us look carefully at each section of the parable, not fearing any conclusion simply because it may be unfavorable to an old viewpoint. Brother Thomas has well said, in his “Rules for Bible Students”:

“Never be afraid of results to which you may be driven by your investigations, as this will inevitably bias your mind and disqualify you to arrive at ultimate truth.”

This parable goes one step beyond the previous parable (that of the sower), yet it follows on in the natural life-cycle of the seed: sowing, sprouting, growing to maturity, and finally harvest. In this parable the “seed” has become more than simply the word of God, as it was in the previous parable (Matt. 13:19). The “seed” now symbolizes the individuals subsequently begotten by the sown word (v. 38) — again, one step further along in their personal development.

“The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field” (v. 24). “The field is the world” (Greek *kosmos*: an arrangement or order) (v. 38): here is the preaching of the gospel message first by Christ and then, by extension, by his disciples and later brethren, in obedience to his command of Mark 16:15,16 and Matthew 28:19 — a command which is still obligatory today. The “seed” takes root and produces fruit from place to place, known as “children of the kingdom” (v. 38). (This “sowing” has been continuous from Christ’s day to ours; there is no arbitrary “boundary line” at A.D. 70 after which the “sowing” was to cease!)

The men who sleep (v. 25) must refer to Christ’s followers and “fellow-laborers” (1 Cor. 3:5-9), the parabolic “workers in the vineyard” (Matt. 20:1-16). The “sleep” represents the sluggishness and carelessness of the appointed ecclesial watchmen in every age (Eph. 5:14; Rom. 13:11; 1 Thes. 5:6) which allows the enemy to do his diabolical work.

The enemy who sows “tares” among the wheat is the “devil” (v. 39), the lusts of the flesh (Heb. 2:14) embodied in individuals and organizations who sow evil and false thoughts *secretly* in the midst of the ecclesias in every age. Again compare Paul’s loving warning in Acts 20:30, where he foretells that after his departure men will arise speaking “perverse” things with the effect of leading away unsuspecting believers. (See also 2 Tim. 3:4-6 — men who “creep in *stealthily*”; Jude 4 — “unawares”; 2 Pet. 2:1; and Gal. 2:4.)

The “tare” or “darnel” is a very troublesome weed found in Oriental wheat fields. It was thought by the ancients to be a degenerate form of wheat (A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 1, p. 589). It looks exactly the same as wheat until late in its growth cycle. Its seed is similar in size and shape, but is gray in color; its fruit is very scarce. When present in a field with good wheat sown broadcast, the roots of the two are intertwined. Thus the darnel can be successfully separated from the good wheat only at the time of harvest. Thankfully, *it causes no danger during growth*, but even a little will spoil *the finished product!*

There is a definite and intended contrast in the Lord’s parables between the “tares”, sown in the midst of the ecclesial field, and the “thorns” (Matt. 13:7,22), already active in the field of the world, in the “soil” of human nature (Gen. 3:18), before the “good seed” is even sown.

The “tares” sown by a subtle and secret enemy produce fruit in the “children of the devil” (v. 38). There were many such intertwined among the faithful believers in Christ’s day (John 8:44; Matt. 3:7; 23:33). Such “children” are lip-servants, hypocrites, “questionable brethren” — not “questionable”, certainly, to him who knows what is in the heart of every man (John 2:24,25), but indeed “questionable” to his brethren who lack such infallible discernment. *By the explicit teaching of Christ, his brethren have no right nor duty to exclude these “tares” from their “fellowship”.*

Of course there are some brethren whose errors in doctrine or conduct *clearly* place them beyond the boundary of traditional Christadelphian “fellowship”, and faithful ecclesias will deal with these brethren in accordance with Matthew 18 and related passages — always remembering, of course, that every opportunity must be given for repentance and reinstatement. It would seem that, in practical terms, this parable is designed to teach us that *most* of our time should be spent in sowing the good seed instead of rooting out those who may or may not be unacceptable to Christ at his judgment. If there is ever any doubt, Christ says, as to a brother’s “fellowship” standing, then let him grow until the harvest (v. 30), when the infallible Reaper will decide his case.

“Let both grow together until the harvest” (v. 30). Some would contend that this commandment refers to the apostasy *outside* the ecclesia. But if this were the case then it would be a pointless commandment, for we have no responsibility there — in the churches of Christendom — at all. Our only freedom of choice lies in the “ecclesial world” (James Carter, “Questions and Answers”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 39, No. 463 — July 1969 — pp. 272-274). And Christ very clearly is telling us there will arise a questionable class within the ecclesias that cannot be discovered and extricated without the risk of doing grievous damage to the true wheat. He is pointing out to ecclesial laborers their inability to judge perfectly, and thus their inability to be always certain that they are uprooting tares instead of wheat. And furthermore he is implying that the “roots” even of the wheat might be weakened by continual agitation.

“The harvest is the end of the world (Greek *aiōn*: age, era, dispensation)” (v. 39). Some brethren suggest that this means A.D. 70, and the related overthrow of Israel is the fulfillment of this parable, but this seems to involve more than a minor dislocation of several related references. In the first place, such an interpretation would imply that the “sowing” or gospel proclamation must also have ceased in A.D. 70, and this is far from the case. Furthermore, the end of the *aiōn* means generally in the Bible the full and final end of Gentile times, marked by the resurrection and the judgment of the responsible. *In this very same chapter* (Matthew 13), in v. 49, the phrase has that obvious meaning. In the world (*aiōn*) to come, ye shall receive eternal life, Jesus said (Luke 18:30).

It is at this judgment that all things will be made manifest (Mark 4:22; Luke 12:2; 1 Cor. 4:5). This is the time for the rewarding of *both* classes. Then and only then will the tares be separated; for, according to the type, they do no damage to the good grain in the field, but even a very little will taint the finished product!

All of the other allusions in Christ's explanation of the parable of the wheat and the tares point just as directly to the judgment of the saints. Consider the following references:

v. 39: "The reapers are the angels" — Other examples of angels at the judgment:

Matt. 24:31: "He shall send his *angels* with a great sound of a trumpet."

Matt. 25:31: "All the holy *angels* with him."

Mark 8:38: "When he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy *angels*."

Luke 12:8,9: "Him shall the Son of Man confess before the *angels* of God."

vv. 41,42: "They shall gather the tares out of his kingdom....there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Similar Scriptures have to do with the last judgment:

Matt. 8:12: "Ye shall be cast out of the kingdom."

Matt. 13:50: "And shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Matt. 24:51: "Shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites."

Luke 13:28: Same as Matt. 8:12.

v. 42: "A furnace of fire": This is the "second death" (Rev. 20:14; cp. Matt. 25:41 and Mark 9:43-47). These allusions to the second death clinch the argument that the "tares" represent false believers, not a "Christian" apostasy that is not even amenable to resurrectional judgment.

v. 43: "Then shall the righteous shine forth." This is a quotation from Daniel 12:1-3, a prophecy of the last days, the resurrection, and the judgment. The righteous ones — the good seed — will shine forth in the newness of Spirit life *at the same time* that the wicked will be subjected to a well-deserved shame and contempt. The analogy of the "harvest", it must be emphasized, requires that the tares be separated *at the same time* as the righteous are rewarded.

"The parable of the tares cannot refer to the Romish apostasy, or equivalent heresies, *for the good seed is NOT growing together with that!* If, however, some still persist in not recognizing the plain teaching of the parable of the tares, what of the adjacent parable of *the net* and *the good and bad fishes*? These are not sorted out until they are brought to land, and then, and not until then, is the division made. This cannot refer to outside apostasy, but rather to developments inside the ecclesia, and *Jesus is warning his followers what to expect*" (*Ibid.*, p. 273).

Other parables picture the same sequence, especially those of the foolish and wise virgins (Matt. 25:1-12); the servants and the talents (25:14-28); and the sheep and the goats (25:31-34).

"If, however, we had to admit that the claims of the critics are true, and that they really are consistently more strict in their fellowship than we are, still it does not necessarily follow that they are more faithful. We want to act as the Lord would have us act. We want to be guided by the precept and example of scripture. *The Lord Jesus was not as strict in condemning offenders as were some contemporary sinners.* The apostle to the Gentiles revealed extraordinary patience in dealing with faults of both doctrine and practice. With these examples before us it must be admitted that *it is possible to err on the side of severity* in the matter of withdrawing from those who are accounted weak or faulty. *Even in ecclesial life an industrious rooting out of tares may be a mistaken zeal*" (I. Collyer, "A Pure Fellowship", *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 95, No. 1128 — June 1958 — p. 259; reprinted from Vol. 68, No. 807 — Sept. 1931 — p. 408).

"It is possible to err on the side of severity." This might be the keynote of Brother Collyer's writings on the broad subject of fellowship. Such an emphasis is notably anticipated in the well-balanced comments of John Thomas on several

occasions, with special reference to the parable under consideration. I quote these as a sort of appendix to our study of the wheat and the tares:

“Beloved brethren, human nature is always tending to extremes and transcending what is written. As the saying is, it will strain at gnats and swallow camels by the herd. It set up the Inquisition and is incessantly prying into matters beyond its jurisdiction. It is very fond of playing the judge and of executing its own decrees. It has a zeal but not according to knowledge, and therefore its zeal is intemperate and not the zeal of wisdom or knowledge rightly used. It professes great zeal for the *purity* of the Church, and would purge out everything that offends its sensitive imagination.

“But is it not a good thing to have a church *without tares*, black sheep, or spotted heifer? Yea, verily, it is an excellent thing. *But then it is a thing the Holy Spirit has never yet developed*, and it cannot be developed by any human judiciary in the administration of spiritual affairs. *There are certain things that must be left to the Lord’s own adjudication when he comes....*” (*The Ambassador*, 1866, pp. 91,92; reprinted under “Dr. Thomas and Divisions”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 67, No. 788 — Feb. 1930 — pp. 52,53).

“The Mystery of Iniquity, then, had its beginning in the Apostolic State. *The seeds of it were then sown broadcast by the enemy*. But they did not ripen as soon as sown; they only began to grow. The fruit was to be the ‘Lawless one’. But fruit, when first formed, is not mature. Considerable time passes from the first appearance of fruit to the time of ingathering because of ripeness. So with the Lawless One, he had to appear as the fruit of the Mystery of Iniquity; but after his appearing, *he had to grow and ripen for the vintage*, when he should be ‘consumed with the spirit of the Lord’s mouth, and destroyed with the brightness of his coming’” (*Eureka*, Vol. 1, p. 431).

“As Paul testified 30 years before, ‘the Mystery of Iniquity’ was ‘already’ at work, and showed itself in the ‘false apostles’ at Ephesus; the spurious Jews of the Synagogue of the Satan, at Smyrna; the Balaamites and Nikolaitans at Pergamos; the children of Jezebel and the Satan, at Thyatira; the twice dead, at Sardis; the but little strength, at Philadelphia; and the wretched and pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked, at Laodicea. *These were tares*, which in 280 years from the day of Pentecost, *choked the good seed, so that a separation had to ensue*.

“*But while the Mystery of Iniquity was thus developing ‘after the working of the Satan’ with all power, and signs and lying wonders.... there existed a class, who not only knew the Truth, but loved it. This was ‘the salt’ of the first three centuries, which gave savour to pre-Constantinian christendom. It was the redeeming and antagonizing element in the Ephesian haters of the deeds of the Nikolaitans; in the Smyranean rich in faith....*

“The Apostolic Christendom, then, to which John wrote, was divisible into these two sections, *which were more or less commingled in the ecclesias generally* — real and nominal christians....” (*Ibid.*, pp. 421,422).

This basic interpretation is followed also by Robert Roberts:

“The reservation [about particular additional demands in fellowship] is a reasonable one, and needless distress is being caused by the insistence of a ruthless rule of excision. There is great danger in this course. *While trying to pull up an incipient tare or two (if they are such) they are levelling whole rows of genuine wheat*” (*The Christadelphian*, Vol. 35, No. 409 — July 1898 — cover page).

And, finally, it is followed by H.P. Mansfield also (“The Parable of the Tares”, *The Story of the Bible*, Vol. 9, No. 4 — Sept. 1965 — pp. 65-69).

5. The One Body (1 Corinthians 12)

“The body is one” (v. 12). It is the Father’s wisdom generally to place believers together in “families”. The ecclesia is more often the object of concern than is the individual standing alone. We are all, whether we like it or not, members of a body. No man should live to himself; that would be selfishness, stagnation, sterility, and a direct contradiction of Paul’s elaborate allegory. The most important lesson of our spiritual education is to learn to think and to act unselfishly as part of the One Body, and not selfishly as a separate individual, even as regards our own salvation.

The body is *one*, yet it has *many* members (v. 14). Some are less beautiful or feebler than others (vv. 22,23), but these too are necessary. “*God hath tempered the body together*” (v. 24); these individuals have been welded together with the ecclesia. In faith and obedience they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Those for whom Christ died must not be treated haughtily or indifferently.

“The beauty and usefulness and purpose of the human body is in its diversity. A severed foot or hand is a repulsive monstrosity. It is obviously dead and useless — detached, broken off, lost, cast aside, rejected; yea, worse: decaying, corrupting, putrefying. But a complete, living, healthy body, with all its parts functioning smoothly together, all perfectly coordinated in grace and symmetry and harmony of movement and purpose, all instantly subject to the one Head — is of great attractiveness, and obvious power and usefulness. No single member can be a body in itself: however accomplished, however skilled, however wise. No one of us can stand alone. We may, by unavoidable force of circumstances, be confined to lonely isolation, like Paul shut up in prison, but we are still part of the Body; and we must, like Paul, think and live and move and breathe as part of the Body. Those who live for themselves alone, however holily they may strive to live, are monstrosities and abortions” (G.V. Growcott, “The Same Care for One Another”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 57, No. 10 — Oct. 1969 — pp. 308,309).

“And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (v. 21). So Paul presses home the point: There should be no schism (division) in the Body (v. 25). “And whether one member suffer, *all* the members suffer with it” (v. 26). Life itself teaches everyone that pain in one member affects the whole body; and the loss of one member, even a small toe, can seriously affect the balance of the whole. It is by no accident or meaningless rhetoric that we find Moses interposing himself as a would-be sacrifice on behalf of his blind and erring countrymen (Exod. 32:30-33). Neither is it to be thought unusual that Nehemiah and David and Daniel and the other prophets showed no sign of dissociating themselves from Israel, no matter how wayward their countrymen became. (And even when Jeremiah ceased praying for his brethren, it was *God’s* decision and not his! — Jer. 14:11.) These men had learned the Bible doctrine of the One Body long before Paul. They lived fully Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 13:

“LOVE suffers long” (v. 4).

“LOVE thinks no evil” (v. 5).

“LOVE bears all things, hopes all things” (v. 7).

“LOVE keeps no score of wrong, does not gloat over other men’s sins, but delights in truth” (v. 6, NEB).

If we might by any means see how often our spiritual perceptions are out of line! In our small and often self-centered “fellowships”, are not our prayers frequent and fervent for the fortunes of Israel “after the flesh”? (And well they should be!) And we feel almost at one in spirit with these long-suffering sons of our father Abraham. But how often do we make mention of *other Christadelphians*, from whom we may be divided by only a single point, except to find fault? These, who — even by the strictest standards — are much more nearly our true brethren than any of the unbelieving Jews! Dare we ask again? Is this the attitude of Paul? of Moses? of Jeremiah or Ezekiel or David?

“It may perhaps be argued that when gangrene sets in, amputation becomes an urgent necessity if life is to be saved. Precisely! Gangrene (like cancer) is a condition in which the damaged or faulty member is not willing to receive and use the healing influences which all the rest of the body, via the blood stream, tries to bring to bear. Instead it is an aggressive evil which, left to itself, will certainly bring death. Here is the false teacher who refuses the help which the ecclesia can make available to him, but who instead employs every effort to spread the corruption which has affected him. For such, excision or amputation is the only course. On the other hand, to take off a toe because the nail is ingrowing, or to gouge out an eye because a squint has developed, is plain folly. In such cases, the body puts up with the defects and takes what action is advisable to restore normality to the defective member” (H. Whittaker, “Block Disfellowship”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 43, No. 513 — Sept. 1973 — p. 342).

There is a simple, common-sense lesson that we must all learn. It is a lesson in humility and patience and faith among other things. *The ecclesia does not exist in order to keep the Truth pure as a theory* (i.e. ‘The purer our ecclesia, the better!’). The Truth (as an abstract principle, or set of principles communicated from God) *cannot* be anything but pure! The ecclesia *does* exist to help *impure* men and women (with *imperfect* beliefs and *impure* ways) to move *toward purity*, even if their progress is slow.

There is no point in an ecclesia existing if it does not understand and confidently accept this duty. If perfect “purity” (i.e. non-contamination) is all the members of the “Body” desire, then the best course would be to disband the ecclesia and allow each individual to bread bread at home. Chop the “Body” into a hundred separate pieces, and isolate each piece in an airtight container! And then you can spend your time wondering what happened to the love, the joy, the fellowship, and the family feeling which you once enjoyed.

Consider again Paul's beautiful inspired allegory: The One Body! "Fearfully and wondrously made.... how marvelous are thy works, O Lord!" (Psa. 139:14). The spiritual body, like the physical body, is not a sterile laboratory "experiment", existing in a fragile regulated environment, behind locked doors! The spiritual Body of Christ, like the "fearful and wondrous" physical body, is much more akin to a *hospital*. Like a hospital, with its Great Physician at its head, it is constantly working even in its imperfection to *heal* its diseased members and to *strengthen* its weak members. And so it must continue, until its work is finished and the One Body — perfected at last — is glorified with its Head for a joyful eternity.

6. The Ecclesia in Sardis (Revelation 3:1-5)

The letters to "the angels of the seven ecclesias" in Asia Minor are the *only* messages sent *personally* by Christ to his ecclesias. They are very important in molding our ecclesial outlook and philosophy, for they are *fundamental* in their application to present-day situations.

How is this so? Firstly, each ecclesia is treated as being responsible for its own affairs only. Even when the Spirit comes to the decidedly lukewarm, almost lost Laodicea, even then there is no call upon the other six ecclesias to disfellowship this erring group. The brotherhood in Asia Minor in the first century apparently knew nothing of "block disfellowship": each of the seven ecclesias was "in fellowship" with the other six, despite internal problems in some cases far more severe than any we have ever witnessed in the latter-day revival of the Truth.

And, even more to the point, each of the seven "stars" is in Christ's right hand (Rev. 1:16; 2:1)! A hasty excommunication of a whole ecclesia (or group of ecclesias) might very well put us in the awkward position of arm-wrestling with the right hand of the Savior! The ecclesias are Christ's dominion; he has warned that no man can pluck them out of his hand (John 10:28). In supporting the Christadelphian stand on worldly politics, we often argue (rightly) that God rules in the world's kingdoms, so why should we interfere? Is it not just as easy for us to grasp the further Biblical principle that Christ rules over the ecclesial world, and that our interference here may also be a fighting against God?

Consider now the special situation in Sardis:

"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.... Be watchful, and strengthen those things that remain, that are ready to die.... Thou hast a few names even *in Sardis* which have not de-filed their garments.... *They are worthy....*"

"*Become watchful*" is the exhortation of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of the ecclesias. Watch and pray through a dark and dangerous night, watch for and be prepared to combat the "wolves" that attack the flock (John 10). "Strengthen those things that remain": Build up what is left of the protective wall, and encourage those who are willing for the *common* work (Neh. 2:18). *Do not withdraw* from the ecclesia, even though it seems ready to die.

"Thou hast a few names *in Sardis*": The few names, or faithful remnant, are still a part of the ecclesia — let it be noted! "They have not defiled their garments." Oh, but this is precisely what the "minority" "fellowships" would say they *had* done, being 'defiled by association'! Notwithstanding, the judgment of Christ stands sure and firm on the page of Scripture: "THEY ARE WORTHY" — despite their "unsavory" associations.

Brother C.C. Walker, past editor of *The Christadelphian*, drew upon this passage when asked by a correspondent concerning the respective merits of the various "fellowships":

"You will be in no danger by obeying the Truth in the fellowship of *The Christadelphian* and the Birmingham ecclesia. Even should this community be as dead as the Church in Sardis, if you walk worthily you will be saved (Rev. 3:4)" ("A Pure Fellowship", Vol. 95, No. 1128 — June 1958 — p. 258).

It should be easily perceived that Brother Walker's position parallels that of Brother Roberts in the following quotation:

"'He that hath the seven Spirits of God' — the symbolic affirmation of omniscience — has little to say in the way of commendation to the brethren in Sardis. 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' Men knew the reputation of the Sardinian ecclesia: the possessor of 'the seven stars' — the seven Spirit lights kindled in the seven ecclesias — knew their state. 'I have not found thy works perfect before God.' Jesus watches and discerns the developments of probation. He requires not to bring men to the judgment seat to know, though he will bring them there to reveal them. There were a few exceptions in Sardis: 'Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have

not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy'; *from which we learn that membership in a dead ecclesia will not interfere with individual acceptance where worthiness exists*" (*Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse*, pp. 20, 21).

The above quotations are not apologies for error! They are, however, hypotheses for the worst possible position to which an ecclesia or a group of ecclesias might fall, without losing fellowship with God. (Can any Christadelphian honestly go on record as believing that the Central fellowship — or any other "group" of Christadelphians, for that matter — is below the standard of these seven ecclesias, which, despite their faults, were still addressed as "ecclesias" and symbolized by "lampstands"?)

Positively speaking, the above quotations are also a corrective to that futile and depressing search for an impossible "purity", which many have been taught is necessary.

In all of Revelation 2 and 3, Christ gives no hint of a command to any one ecclesia to excommunicate any of the others, not even Laodicea. The reason may be easily determined: The avowed basis of faith and fellowship of each congregation was nominally sound, despite internal problems (which could not and should not be judged at a distance). Christ himself firmly holds the prerogative to punish or cast out erring individuals and ecclesias in other localities.

Do we really believe that Christ rules today in the ecclesias — in Bible terminology, that we walk among the seven lampstands (Rev. 1:13)? If we do, then consider this: Christ warned the seven first-century ecclesias of their possible removal due to apostasy (Rev. 2:5). They are not in existence today, because they did not continue to heed the exhortations delivered through the Apostle John. It was not persecution that removed these lightstands; it was their failure to honor God. Can we not also have the same confidence today that Christ has control of every situation, that Christ can handle such matters as he did in the first century, without our imperfect meddling and second-guessing in matters too difficult for us? Let us also remember 1 John 2:19:

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us."

I have quoted above from Brother Thomas as follows:

"The Apostolic Christendom, then, to which John wrote, was divisible into these two sections, *which were more or less commingled in the ecclesias generally* — real and nominal christians...." (*Eureka*, Vol. 1, p. 422).

To this I will add a further short quotation:

"Antipas still retained his original position in *all* the ecclesias, which, *although teeming with 'false brethren' both in the presbyteries and among the multitudes*, had not yet been 'spued out of the mouth of the Spirit.' Antipas was the remnant of the Woman's Seed contending earnestly for the faith...." (*Ibid.*, p. 335).

A view of our duties in regard to ecclesial fellowship that is in harmony with Revelation 3:1-5 is presented by Brother John Carter:

"We must keep firmly to two rules, which might be considered by extremists to be contradictory, but which are complementary. All ecclesias as a basis of co-operation must acknowledge the same fundamental truths, while at the same time each ecclesia must have the right of judging any doubtful case. The first maintains the truth; the second provides for an ecclesia taking account of all the factors in any borderline case, *those factors being only known to the members of that ecclesia*. There must then be mutual *respect for each other's judgments*" ("A House Divided", *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 94, No. 1115 — May 1957 — p. 187).

"In an attempt to justify such action [i.e. disfellowship of 'erring' ecclesias] it has been suggested recently that although we are not informed of such a move, *it may be assumed* that after reading the Spirit's letter, the faithful few in Sardis would withdraw from the dead majority. But even if they did withdraw after hearing the Spirit's judgment, *would that justify us in withdrawing before any judgment has been passed?* For our own part we will not venture to judge that any who hold the One Faith are dead or unworthy. If any man sins we accept the judgment of the majority of his ecclesia as to whether he should be rebuked or cut off from fellowship, but even in the latter extreme we should have his ultimate salvation as a main object and so be most ready to restore him 'in the spirit of meekness'. As for *wholesale* condemnation of an ecclesia as 'dead', we would not venture so to judge even of those which appear most negative. Christ has not passed judgment on the brethren of the latter days. When he

does give his verdict undoubtedly there be some dreadful surprises” (I. Collyer, “A Pure Fellowship”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 68, No. 807 — Sept. 1931 — p. 410).

7. The Ecclesia in Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-25)

“The letter to Thyatira is, if possible, even more pointed. Thyatira had a false prophetess Jezebel who had already been openly admonished regarding her evil teaching (whatever it was): ‘I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.’ Included in the Lord’s rebuke of this ecclesia is the reproach: ‘Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel to teach and to seduce my servants....’ Even so, Thyatira was not deemed unworthy of fellowship with the Lord. *And far from there being any requirement placed on the faithful to separate themselves from the contaminating influence of Jezebel and her coterie, the exact opposite is explicitly laid upon them:* ‘But unto you I say, and unto the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come.’ Such words need no explaining. They tell their own story.

“Other letters to the Churches emphasize the same lesson even more forcefully, if that be possible. Ecclesias like Smyrna and Philadelphia incurred no reproach from the Lord of any sort. Yet if the ‘exclusives’ are right in their insistence on a ‘pure fellowship’, both of these ecclesias were sadly at fault in that they had not broken off all fellowship with Sardis, Thyatira, Laodicea. The rejoinder that they were too far from these other ecclesias to know about the vexed problems existing there is ridiculous nonsense. Asia was one of the most highly developed areas in the Roman Empire, and these cities lay on its main arteries. Intercommunication in remote corners of the empire may have been somewhat uncertain, but here in Asia conditions were more comparable with the twentieth century. Thus Smyrna and Philadelphia continued in uninterrupted fellowship with ecclesias which the Lord himself castigated” (H. Whittaker, “Block Disfellowship”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 43, No. 513 — Sept. 1973 — p. 341).

Brother Thomas concludes the same — that is, that all other ecclesias (those other six mentioned in the Apocalypse and their latter-day counterparts) are “in fellowship” with Laodicea (*Eureka*, Vol. 1, p. 403). His position here is decidedly at variance with many of the “stricter fellowships” of today!

8. Diotrephes (3 John)

The Scriptures do present at least one picture of mass disfellowship, but it is in a bad light, and instigated by an entirely undesirable character.

During the last generation of the first century, the “fellowship situation” can best be described as chaotic. Paul’s last writings are far from optimistic, and John’s letters show an elderly apostle — the last of his generation — contending against the practices of men who scarcely if at all deserve the name “brother” (A. Eyre, “Problems of Fellowship in the First Century Ecclesia”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 108, No. 1283 — May 1971 — p. 210).

Such a man was Diotrephes — emblematic of a certain spirit within the ecclesias. Diotrephes was domineering, self-assertive, and arrogant. Defying the loving authority of the aged John, he could — so it seems — “cast out” of fellowship (contrast John 6:37) with impunity those associating with the apostles, or, for that matter, anyone of whom he disapproved. Like some modern brethren of the same stamp, he also “cast out” those who failed to “cast out” the brethren he had “cast out” — in the ultimate extension of the “guilt-by-association” syndrome.

Brother Eyre in his article points out that, with ease of communication in the Roman Empire, it was common for preachers to travel from ecclesia to ecclesia on lengthy missionary journeys. Such activities posed problems of fellowship then as now. Wherever the ecclesia was to which Diotrephes belonged, it included as members both those who rejected these preacher brethren, and those who welcomed them. John appears, then, to be presuming on his almost universal standing in the brotherhood, when he “interferes” in a tricky internal affair of another ecclesia. Notice, however, that his “interference” — if it may be so termed — is not for the disfellowshipping of any individual, but rather is for the acceptance of “the brethren” (v. 5). *And John does not even counsel the disfellowship of the despicable Diotrephes!*

The phrase “casting out” (v. 10) is a very harsh and cruel term, as Brother Eyre explains:

“If the Master himself was able to conduct most of his preaching within the synagogue system, however grudgingly received by those in power, he had no illusions as to the long-term fate of the church following his ascension to the Father. ‘Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils (Greek **Sanhedrins**, i.e. local courts) and flog you in their synagogues’ (Matt. 10:17, RSV)” (*Ibid.*, No. 1279 — Jan. 1971 — p. 16).

Examine closely and without prejudice this first-century picture of inter-ecclesial affairs. How similar it is to our own day: an imperfectly joined network of congregations, with no universally recognized leader (even the apostles met frequent opposition); an arrangement calling for forbearance and patience and tolerance, not to mention the occasional compromise! Certainly not the place for fallible would-be leaders to issue “bulls” of excommunication either against or on behalf of uninformed brethren.

Notice that even the apostle John does not declare, “Disfellowship Diotrophes”. Notice also the presumed “conflict”: Gaius will receive “the brethren”; Diotrophes will *not* receive them. And yet they are considered — by no less than an inspired apostle — to be “in fellowship” with one another. What a “field day” some Christadelphians have with similar unfortunate yet unavoidable situations in the twentieth century! Little do they realize that their scorn is also directed, by extension, against the “disciple whom Jesus loved”.

“Wherever there is intolerance; wherever we find conditions of communion among Christians imposed, *which Christ hath not clearly enjoined*; wherever creeds and modes of worship are enforced by human power, and men made to forfeit any of their civil rights, or are stigmatized on these accounts, there is the spirit which is not of God. Wherever one Christian, or a number of Christians, assumes the seat of authority and judgment in the Church of Christ, wherever they call for fire to destroy those who dissent from them, or only exclude them from their communion and affection, there is a portion of the spirit of Anti-christ, which has so long opposed itself to the benign principles of the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace, has been the cause of so many evils to humanity, and the occasion of making the inconsiderate esteem the amiable yet distinct and uncompromising religion of Jesus, as a source of mischief, instead of benevolence.

“Alas, how much of this spirit remains amongst us all! How few have learned that, ‘In Christ circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God’ “ (J. Thomas, *Herald*, 1850).

9. The Scriptural Procedure (Matthew 18)

The key passage here with regard to fellowship (or more precisely, disfellowship) is verses 15-17:

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the ecclesia; but if he neglect to hear the ecclesia, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

It is evident from a full consideration of the context, that the sin here is primarily a matter of personal offence, not of doctrinal divergence. (Compare v. 21: “...sin against *me*...” and v. 35: “if ye forgive not every one *his brother*...”.) However, these verses are often considered to be the primary guideline to the pursuing and expunging of *doctrinal* errors from the ecclesia; so let us carefully consider the passage from that viewpoint.

“If thy brother trespass against thee”, then you — being by Bible standard and precept “your brother’s keeper” (Gen. 4:9) — are bound to warn the offender with the express purpose of turning him from his sin (Ezek. 3:17-21). Your love, actively manifested in an unpleasant task, may “cover a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).

In such cases the offender should not be evilly thought of, or spoken of. His status and feelings will be as fully considered and respected as one’s own. Neither will he be confronted from motives and feelings personal to the visitor, but solely and purely for his own good who has transgressed.

With the object of gaining, not of sacrificing his brother, the careful brother should in the spirit of meekness strive to restore the faulty; and he should consider his own imperfections and weaknesses and consequent liability to fall into temptation (Gal. 6:1). Every step that might lead to New Testament disfellowship (or withdrawal) was *always* intended to facilitate the repentance and reclamation of the offender. The Son of Man himself came into the world with the purpose of saving that which was lost (Matt. 18:11) — and well might we be thankful that he did that very thing!

Note the special precise sequence to be followed:

(1) Tell him his fault between you and him *alone*. How many falter at the very first step who desire to be “peacemakers”, but instead become “peace-keepers”, i.e. “law enforcement officials” in the ecclesias!

(2) Then — only *if* he fails to hear you — go with one or two others. And should not the one or two others be those who by experience and temperament are best able to rectify the division, not simply best able to support your contention and most likely to take your side no matter what?

The two or three witnesses confirm every word. This is a necessary counterbalance to the frequent malicious tendency of the flesh to believe without verification every evil word spoken against another brother.

(3) Finally, all else failing, you should go to the ecclesia. Whose ecclesia? Yours or his? His, of course, because it is the one with primary jurisdiction in the case. Implicit in the Master’s advice is no doubt the final step: After you tell the ecclesia, you bow out; the ecclesia now being properly informed has sole authority to pursue the matter. (In our modern-day inter-ecclesial tangle, with its rapid communications and sometimes volatile differences, this point and the next become very important.)

(4) One command that is not given, but so often “read into” Matthew 18: “Then tell it to *all the ecclesias!*” This would serve the dubious purpose of taking the “sins” (real or imagined) of your brother, whom you ostensibly sought to help, and broadcasting them to the ends of the world. This is wrong, it is malicious, and it is also a violation of the spirit of the commandment here and of the Scriptural basis of all inter-ecclesial relationships (as in Rev. 2 and 3).

We should notice, in any survey of Matthew 18, the related passage in the *Ecclesial Guide*, entitled “Cases of Sin and Withdrawal” (1949 Edition, p. 24). From there we quote:

“There should be a stringent refusal to hear an evil report concerning anyone until the reporter has taken the Scriptural course....”

And in another place Brother Roberts comments on the procedure:

“Nothing tends more to the keeping or the restoring of peace than the observance of this law; and no law is more constantly broken. The universal impulse, when anything is supposed to be wrong, is to tell the matter to third persons. From them it spreads, with the results of causing much bad feeling which, perhaps, the original cause does not warrant and would not have produced if the aggrieved person had taken the course prescribed by Christ, and told the fault ‘between thee and him alone.’ If good men, or those who consider themselves such, would adopt the rule of refusing to listen to an evil report privately conveyed, until it had been dealt with to the last stage according to the rule prescribed by Christ, much evil would be prevented” (“Between Thee and Him Alone”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 59, No. 4 — April 1971 — p. 119).

We note how the full and complete context speaks so eloquently, not of judgment, nor of condemnation or disfellowship, but rather of reconciliation, reunion, mercy, and forgiveness:

(1) Verse 14: “It is not my Father’s will that any of these little ones [cp. the children of vv. 1-6] should perish.” Surely these fellowship matters are dynamite, and when wrongly handled they explode and the weak ones and the young ones “for whom Christ died” are most in danger of injury or “death”. How many young ones, it may be asked, ever perished spiritually because of that “dangerous” but little-understood “false doctrine” or improper action halfway round the globe? But how many truly became disillusioned and ultimately drifted away from the Brotherhood because of the grievous spectacle — on their own doorsteps — of envious, small-minded brethren, and their internal bickering and accusatory letters?

(2) How many times should I forgive? “Until seventy times seven” (v. 22). Almost without end! And Jesus adds the parable of the debtors, with the comment that the Father in heaven will by no means forgive the unforgiving (vv. 23-35). Notice the extreme contrasts in this parable. How heavily must the balance be weighted on the side of mercy in our cases!

It may also be noted that in Matthew 18 there is no provision for a disgruntled, dissatisfied individual or minority to withdraw from the ecclesia because of a difference in judging a case. The ecclesia, as a body, is assumed to have the greater ability judiciously to weigh the facts and to reach a Scriptural and just decision. Most of our ecclesial “constitutions” contain a provision to this effect:

“That we mutually engage to submit to the order and arrangements preferred by the greater number” (Article 5 of the Birmingham “Constitution”).

It may be confidently asserted that nearly every division in the Christadelphian world since these words were written has been brought about by a disregard of this very principle, which all have bound themselves to honor.

Finally, if it be argued that Matthew 18:15-17 applies only to individual cases in one’s own ecclesia, and not to cases in other ecclesias, then I would ask:

(1) Should it be easier — in view of the doctrine of the One Body and the superlative examples of and inducements to peace and unity — to judge and disfellowship thousands at a distance than individuals at home?

(2) Or, put the other way round, do many brethren deserve less love and consideration than one?

This section closes with a document drawn up by several brethren in England during the “Berean” division of the 1920’s, entitled “A Series of Rules proposed to govern inter-ecclesial disputes, based on Matthew 18:15-17”:

1. That imputations against brethren affecting their fidelity to the faith ought not to be made except as commanded by Christ.
2. That the same rule applies to ecclesias — especially as affecting inter-ecclesial co-operation.
3. So, if a brother is convinced that a brother or brethren in an ecclesia of which he is *not* a member is or are advocating heresy, or otherwise in danger of rejection at the judgment seat of Christ, the proper course for such a brother to adopt is:
 - (a) First to see that brother ‘and tell him his fault with him alone’.
 - (b) If unable to adjust the matter, then it is his duty to ask the help of one or two more members of the ecclesia to whom the erring brother belongs, ‘that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’
 - (c) Failing agreement, the case may then be considered by the ecclesia to which the erring brother belongs, in which case the brother originally moving in the matter shall have the opportunity of being present with full liberty of speech.
 - (d) If the matter cannot be adjusted in harmony with the wishes of the brother who has endeavored to help an erring one on his way to the kingdom, he is then at liberty to consider whether he shall refuse co-operation with them in their labors and shall respectfully notify his intention to the said brother and ecclesia in question.
 - (e) In case no further attempt is made by the ecclesia thus notified to adjust the matter, he may now ask the ecclesia to which he belongs to join him in refusal of cooperation.
4. The above rules may not be possible of observance in detail where ecclesias are so far separated as to make a personal interview unfeasible, but in any case, an opportunity should be given for those who are associated with one who teaches error, to repudiate the same before exclusion from fellowship” (“So Do Unto Them”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 61, No. 724 — Oct. 1924 — p. 455).

With the above agree also the very well-balanced remarks of Brother Roberts (“A Second Voyage to Australia”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 35, No. 410 — Aug. 1898 — pp. 331,332), from which I quote the following extracts:

“It ought not to be in the power of any ecclesia to pass judgment on an accused brother in his absence, unless that absence was wilful. This was an elementary principle recognized in every system of law, ancient or modern, human or divine. It was a feature of British law all over the world — that no man should be condemned without the opportunity and invitation to answer the charge made against him. It used to be the same with Roman law, as casually comes out in Acts 25:16:

‘It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die before that he that is accused have the accusers face to face and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.’

“The Jews observed the same practice:

‘Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?’ (John 7:15)

“Lastly, Christ enjoined the same thing in the law of Matthew 18 for dealing with an offending brother, only that he added the merciful requirement (absent from all human laws), that public accusation should not be made until the accused had been approached personally and privately by the accuser, and a second time with one or two others in case of failure.”

10. The Desirability of Reconciliation (Matthew 5:23,24)

In attempting to get at the Scriptural teaching upon any divine principle, the diligent student finds it useful to consider not only those passages which bear on their face a direct relation to the subject, but also those which contribute only an indirect emphasis.

The idea of reconciliation is quite pervasive in the teachings of Christ. How else could it be for one in whom God was reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19)? This is nowhere more evident than in that section of his teachings known popularly as the Sermon on the Mount. Here, in rapid succession, the Divine Master places his blessing upon the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers — the reconcilers! The “Beatitudes” are followed by the warning:

“Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20).

Jesus could not have meant that his listeners should follow a *more abundant* “righteousness” than that of the Pharisees: that would have been well nigh impossible at any rate. He must have meant a “righteousness” of a different sort — leaving behind the painstaking legal hair-splittings of washing and purifying; the wearisome fretting about contamination and separateness in a ceremonial sense. The righteousness that Jesus advocates is an earnest, loving consideration for one’s brother, the principle rather than the appearance of righteousness, a reaching forward and not a pulling back:

“Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment” (v. 22, RSV).

We can well imagine the skeptic’s words: “Yes, this is all well and good; but what does it have to do with ‘fellowship’?” The answer is found in the next two verses:

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; FIRST BE RECONCILED to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (vv. 23,24).

The “gifts” we offer to God at this time, which Christ must have had in mind, are prayers and praises (Psa. 141:2; Hos. 14:2). The “altar” to which we now approach is Christ himself, in heaven at the right hand of the Father, where he acts as priest and mediator also (Heb. 13:10; 1 John 2:1). The lesson is obvious, and has — it may now be seen — a strong bearing upon our “fellowship”: Even if your “lamb” or “gift” (i.e. your personal, individual worship and service) is “without blemish”, you must still be *reconciled to your brother* before God will be pleased to accept it! Only when reconciliation is sought, and peace is made, and brethren dwell together in unity (Psa. 133:1) — only then is the invitation extended: “Come and offer thy gift.”

The Proverbs tell us there are seven abominable things, which God hates. The seventh (the worst?) of these is “he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:19). If this is so, then the teaching by contrast would be this: he whom God loves above all else, who is worthy of the seventh (the greatest?) blessing, is the peacemaker and the reconciler — “he who sows *accord* among brethren”.

“The command of Christ is, ‘BE RECONCILED.’ *Jesus does not discuss where the fault may lie.* That is unimportant. The important part is — Seek reconciliation, continually, always. Not just go through the motions once or twice, like a technical Pharisee. He says — BE reconciled; keep at it; never give up the effort. IF THESE COMMANDS WERE OBEYED, THERE COULD BE NO ECCLESIAL PROBLEMS” (G.V. Growcott, “Be Ye Therefore Perfect”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 57, No. 2 — Feb. 1969 — p. 47).

“Brethren in Christ must PRACTICE reconciliation, atonement, and unity, not seeking to expose sins but to recover the sinner. They have no authority from Christ to mark up the failings of others and to make known from the housetops their deviations and sins....We should be no wedge-drivers but reconcilers, and not fall into the error of rejoicing more over the one sheep that is lost than over the one that is found, over withdrawing fellowship rather than restoring it” (The Committee of *The Christadelphian*, “Fellowship — Its Spirit and Practice”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 109, No. 1291 — Jan. 1972 — p. 11).

11. Judging and Not Judging (Matthew 7:1,2)

We are on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has come up from Judea after his experience of temptation in the wilderness; he has gathered round him many disciples and is teaching them — “a light shining in a dark place”. His teaching is altogether extraordinary, as one having authority, and not as the scribes. His opening note is something new and beautiful: “Blessed!” Blessed are the poor... the mourners... the meek... the pure in heart.

He comes at length to judgment — judgment not in the sense of discernment and discrimination, but in the sense of fault-finding and condemnation:

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:1,2).

The context is the “parable” of the mote and the beam (vv. 3-5). The saying is found in the rabbinical writings, and is an example of the caustic Jewish humor.

It is not difficult to make the transition here from the case of individuals to that of ecclesias or “fellowship” groups.

“With what measure we mete and with what judgment we judge, we shall ourselves *individually* and *communally* be assessed” (The Committee of *The Christadelphian*, “Fellowship — Its Spirit and Practice”, Vol. 109, No. 1291 — Jan. 1972 — p. 12).

Who belongs to a “perfect” (or even “near-perfect”) group? Are there not always problems nearer to home to occupy the industrious brother, without the necessity of seeking to remove a “mote” from an ecclesial “eye” halfway round the world?

We should never judge those in other “fellowships” more severely than we would wish to be judged in the *weakest link* of our own “fellowship”. And if such judgment would make us wince, then perhaps we should re-evaluate our situation!

“The wonderful thing about the Speaker [of Matt. 7:1,2] is that he himself is so clear-eyed! There is neither beam nor mote there! He can judge without ‘hypocrisy’. And he will. ‘The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son’ (John 5:22). Whosoever therefore usurps this function is guilty of ‘contempt of court’, ‘the court above’! Hence an apostle says to his brethren in the midst of their carnal jealousies and strifes: ‘With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you... but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes....’ (1 Cor. 4:3-5)... Do not behave as though you sought your brother’s damnation rather than his salvation. ‘He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends’ (Prov. 17:9). Do not do it; God hates it!” (C.C. Walker, “Judge Not”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 61, No. 720 — June 1924 — p. 266).

It must not be supposed that Matthew 7 prohibits all ecclesial “judging”. Obviously, there are times when ecclesias (through their arranging brothers, or by other means) are called upon to “judge”. But in such cases it must be the clear pronouncement of Holy Scripture which provides the basis, and not a whim or passing fancy or even a tradition, well-intended though it be! And judgment must be approached very carefully and humbly, according to the spirit as well as the letter of Matthew 18. Some good rules to observe in such cases, which reflect the Spirit teaching of the verses under consideration, are as follows:

1. Do not impute to your brethren evil motives (James 4:11).
2. Do not condemn your “weak brother” for what you may consider to be his “imperfect” service (Rom. 14:1-13).
3. Do not withhold forgiveness when the Bible teaches that God can offer it (James 2:13). Under no circumstances has our Father laid upon us the burden of being stricter than He has expressly said Himself to be!
4. Do not anticipate Christ’s judgment (1 Cor. 4:5). Our brother is above all else “another man’s servant” (Rom. 14:4), not our own!

In all the above the emphasis is upon this: We must only with extreme care and reluctance undertake to pass any judgment. We must do so only when absolutely necessary, and not just to satisfy some whim or to elevate ourselves by casting others down. And we must never assume our own infallibility; the Holy Spirit power of “judging” (such as that employed by the apostle Peter upon Ananias and Sapphira) has long since ceased from among the ecclesias.

With all the above agree the wise words of Brother Roberts:

“It is certainly true that no man ought to speak of a brother’s faults behind his back until he have spoken to himself alone, and afterwards with others. But even then, you must be quite sure that the fault is of a kind that would warrant you in withdrawing if he do not submit. If there is any doubt on this head, be silent, and leave the Lord to judge at his coming. We generally find men unwilling to leave things to the Lord. They act as though they had no faith in the Lord’s coming, and as if Paul had never written:

‘Judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come who will make manifest the counsels of the heart’ (1 Cor. 4:5) —

that is, the secret motives which no man can know, and which require to be known before a correct estimate of his action is possible....

“It would be wrong for us to judge in personal cases. It is possible to say what ought and what ought not to be done, as a matter of duty for all men; but when it comes to a question whether these are or are not done by particular men, we enter a forbidden field. We must not judge; we must not condemn. We must leave the Lord to do that at his coming.

“We can, of course, withdraw from a brother who walks disobediently and defends it; *but even this we must not do till we have seen him a few times and given him every opportunity of justifying himself.* If men were more busy judging THEMSELVES, which they are COMMANDED to do, they would not have so much propensity for judging others, which they are forbidden to do” (“Judge Not: Condemn Not”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 35, No. 411 — Sept. 1898 — pp. 388,389).

“The scriptural command is, over and over:

‘Judge not, that ye be not judged.’

“With our puny little limited minds, it is impossible for us to judge fairly, even if we should have all the facts. And we never have ALL the facts... We must never judge motives, or seek occasions of fault-finding, or believe and peddle hurtful rumors, or talk behind peoples’ backs, or speak of sins — either real or supposed — TO ANYONE EXCEPT THE PERSON INVOLVED. In doing such, we condemn ourselves. The stern penalties of the law of Christ are very fearful against any of these fleshly abominations:

‘As ye judge, so shall ye be judged’ ”

(G.V. Growcott, “Tribulation Worketh Patience”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 61, No. 3 — March 1973 — p. 81).

“This is a very important first principle of the Truth. The warning is:

‘With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged’ (Matt. 7:2).

“Therefore it is always wisdom to judge with mercy and kindness and compassion and fellow-feeling, wherever we must judge at all. When we indulge in the flesh-satisfying practice of judging and criticizing others, we are not only directly disobedient to this command — we are also manifesting that we do not have the mind and spirit of Christ, and therefore are none of his” (G.V. Growcott, “Be Ye Therefore Perfect”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 57, No. 2 — Feb. 1969 — p. 51).

12. Him that is Weak in the Faith (Romans 14)

In Romans 14:1 Paul has left explicit instruction about the attitude to be adopted toward those who take up wrong ideas. It is quite difficult to reconcile this advice with the drastic policy of almost immediate cutting-off as practiced by some:

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations” — or “not for disputes over opinions” (RSV).

The form of the Greek verb here means “go on receiving”; the RSV is even more gracious: “Welcome him.” Here is no grudging, grumbling acceptance, but open-hearted full Christian fellowship. It is the business of the “strong” (or those who consider themselves so) to “walk the extra mile” in receiving and helping, not “judging”, the “weak” (Rom. 15:1,2).

“The ecclesia is to receive those who are troubled by these conflicting thoughts and doubts, not however, to judge or condemn them for such, but to help them reach unto a full conviction of faith” (H.P. Mansfield, “Epistle to the Romans”, *The Logos*, Vol. 34, No. 8 — July 1968— p. 250).

“It is easy to see why Paul so advises. As long as the weak brother with (slightly) off-beat ideas continues in the fellowship of sounder brethren there is some hope that by degrees he will achieve a more balanced point of view. Such things have been known to happen. But the necessary condition must be observed: ‘Not to doubtful disputations.’ If such a problem individual is to continue to share the blessings of the community, he must be prepared to cease all forms of propagation of the ideas he has espoused. Only on these eminently reasonable terms can his membership in the family of Christ be tolerated” (H. Whittaker, “Block Disfellowship”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 43, No. 513 — Sept. 1973 — p. 344).

The reason for such toleration in “doubtful” cases is given by Paul in vv. 4 and 10:

“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth....”

Here “judge” signifies “to set at nought”, or “to despise”; the RSV reads “to pass judgment” — as in a formal judicial setting. Here is the type of self-righteous, superior condemnation that may so easily pass into contempt for the “weak” brother for whom Christ died (v. 15).

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

The reason given for a wise hesitancy in disfellowshipping doubtful cases is the shadow of Christ’s judgment seat, before which we shall *all* stand! “All”, disfellowshipper and disfellowshipped alike! “All”, “strong” and “weak” alike! All must stand to receive in their bodies according as they have done, whether good or evil, on the Scriptural principle:

“To whom much is given, of him much shall be required” (Luke 12:48).

The “strong” will be judged on how they used their strength, either to strengthen others or to entrench themselves in “superior” positions. The “weak” will no doubt be judged more leniently, allowances being made for their weaknesses in logic and precision in the deeper principles of truth:

“Precious though the gift of precise thinking may be, it can become unbearably tyrannical if over-pressed, and we must beware of the danger of making it seem that salvation, or even fellowship itself, is a matter of competence in logic or consistency in exposition” (The Committee of *The Christadelphian*, “Fellowship — Its Spirit and Practice”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 109, No. 1291 — Jan. 1972 — p. 10).

One of the longest and most destructive divisions in Christadelphian history began on just such a note: A brother’s inconsistent expositions on the nature and sacrifice of Christ led to a worldwide disruption of fellowship, with many thousands of “innocent bystanders” never sure what his doubtful opinions really were!

The brother in question was Brother A.D. Strickler, of Buffalo. The division, by which was formed the “Berean” fellowship, began in the early 1920’s. Brother Strickler died in 1940, after which attempts (by Brother John Carter, editor of *The Christadelphian*, and others) to heal the breach were largely successful in 1953, at least in America. A very small remnant of the original “Berean” fellowship still exists in the United States and Canada today. The former “Berean” fellowship in England became, for the most part, the current “Dawn” fellowship, after a further division caused by some ecclesias adding clauses to their Statement of Faith and Basis of Fellowship regarding divorce and remarriage.

Back to Romans 14: Paul continues in v. 19 with a plea for “peace”: Let us “pursue”, he says, those things that tend to peace and edification, or upbuilding. Ecclesias must make a conscious, positive choice to promote peace if at all possible. On the one side are set, as things *always* desirable, “peace” and “edification”; on the other, as things *never* desirable, bitterness and division and strife and dismantling of ecclesias.

Paul's advice in Romans 14 is in direct contrast to the popular "*first* pure, *then* peaceable" syndrome, as misapplied by so many. (The true meaning of James 3:17 is considered at length in Chapter 36.) Here is obviously something "impure", in the sense of being doubtful and disputatious, pertaining to the faith, but still Paul counsels the need for peace! While the affected ecclesia is experiencing peace within and a cordial relationship with its sister-ecclesias, then the "body" will be better able to correct the minor annoyance of a doubtful opinion. But just let there be an accusatory letter, a "call to arms" in a remote area where the "problem" has not even reached, a cry for "purity at any cost": and the situation rapidly deteriorates into a full-blown division.

Of course, we must arrive at last at the question that is as old as divisions themselves: **How does one distinguish between a truly serious error and what is merely a "doubtful" opinion?**

In the first place, a teaching or practice should *plainly* be prohibited in the "basis of fellowship" before it should be considered even the potential subject of a division. And even then, it should be exceedingly plain that the brother in question does believe the error; in other words, that the "error" is not merely deduced as a "logical consequence" of some other idea of his!

Such discernment is not always as easy as it might seem. To the "purist" very little is ever doubtful; there are no "gray areas" in *his* mind. But to the brethren "in the forefront of the hottest battle", trying to sift through conflicting testimony, trying to chase down rumors (some malicious), trying to give every consideration to the accused, it is a far different matter. It should be a fair rule, then, that no division should be initiated or continued except on clear, undeniable grounds. The issue, the principles involved, should be so clear that *both sides* are agreed as to the *facts* of the matter, if nothing else!

The issue should be so clear that even "babes in Christ" may easily understand why their leaders have insisted upon separation. And the issue should be so clear that those brethren or ecclesias that are excommunicated may say, 'Yes, there is a definite difference between our beliefs and yours.' If divisions are otherwise, then those who bring about such doubtful divisions bear a great burden of guilt, for they have placed themselves in direct violation of Romans 14:1. In their strivings over opinions (and pride and position?) they may discourage and drive entirely away from the Truth those who are "weak in the faith". Christ's warning about the treatment of the "little ones" (Matt. 18:6) is well-worth remembering here.

13. The First Letter of John

Jesus loved all his disciples, but there was something very special and unique about John. It must have been because of John's special character; it was certainly not mere favoritism. The depth and closeness of love depends upon mental and spiritual affinity; it is limited only by the comprehension and capacity of the participants. John was especially beloved because of a deeper unity with the mind of his Master.

"John was the first to believe after the resurrection when he saw the empty tomb. Though not prominent in the history, John wrote the deepest gospel, the deepest epistle (this one) and the deepest prophecy (Revelation)" (G.V. Growcott, "Fellowship with Him", *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 56, No. 9 — Sept. 1968 — p. 274).

John was the disciple chosen by the Holy Spirit to record the deepest and most beautiful expressions in Scripture of "fellowship". His searching words reach far beneath the thin veneer of man-made "fellowship" and man-instigated "disfellowship"; even those verses (1 John 1:6,7) which are often quoted to justify rapid and ruthless "cutting off" will be seen under a closer inspection to have a fuller, richer significance.

"There is only one major book in the Scriptures which may be said to deal specifically with the subject of fellowship, and significantly it was penned at the very close of the apostolic age: 1 John. Its origin is linked with the departure from fellowship of a substantial and influential group of members:

'They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us' (2:19)'

(A. Eyre, "Problems of Fellowship in the First Century", *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 108, No. 1283 — May 1971 — p. 212).

It is worthwhile to note this, in the epistle that has more to do with "fellowship" than any other: The *primary* resolution of an ecclesial disagreement was *not* the excision of the unfaithful by the faithful, but the final withdrawal from the faithful by the unfaithful. Obviously, this is not the *only* prescribed method for dealing with error or misconduct, but all too often we lose

sight of the fact that it is *one* divinely-approved outcome! The extremist's position is that an otherwise righteous brother may become unrighteous through a passing association with unrighteous men, regardless of his endeavors to uphold the Truth personally. But to John *this is just not the case!* There is no condemnation of the faithful remnant even though they were "tolerating" errorists in their midst. (The Old Testament affords at least two similar instances of the unfaithful withdrawing from the "one body": "Every man to his tents, O Israel" of Sheba in 2 Samuel 20:1, and "What portion have we in David?" — the revolt of the ten tribes — in 1 Kings 12:16.)

It is safe to assume there is at least one statement of Brother Thomas that is never quoted by the "pure fellowship" advocates. Towards the end of his life, in 1870, he wrote the following words:

"It is not my province to issue bulls of excommunication, but simply to shew what the truth teaches and commands. I have to do with principles, not men. If anyone say that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh common to us all, the apostle John saith that that spirit or teacher is not of God; is the deceiver and the anti-Christ, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ; and is therefore not to be received into the house, neither to be bidden Godspeed (1 John 4:3; 2 John 7,9,10). I have nothing to add or to take from this. It is the sanctifying truth of the things concerning the 'name of Jesus Christ'. All whom the apostles fellow-shipped, believed it; and all in the apostolic ecclesias who believed it not — *and there were such* — had not fellowship with the apostles, but opposed their teachings; and when they found they could not have their own way, John says, 'They went out from us, for they — the anti-Christ — were not all of us' (1 John 2:19). *The apostles did not chase them out, but they went out of their own accord*, not being able to endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3).

"Then preach the word, etc., and exhort with all long-suffering and teaching. This is the purifying agent. *Ignore brother this and brother that in said teaching*; for personalities do not help the argument. Declare what you as a body believe to be the apostles' doctrines. Invite fellowship upon that basis alone. If upon that declaration any take the bread and wine, not being offered by you, they do so upon their own responsibility, and not on yours. If they help themselves to the elements, they endorse your declaration of doctrine, and eat condemnation to themselves."

* * * * *

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

By "we" John must mean the apostles, who heard and saw and touched the living Christ "from the beginning" (vv. 1,2). The apostles were commissioned to share this living reality with others, that they might have fellowship with the apostles, but primarily that they might through that knowledge have personal fellowship with God and His Son. The oneness depends upon our learning and accepting and harmonizing ourselves with the revelations of the apostles.

"And what is fellowship? We must ever be on guard against letting technicalities take the place of realities. Fellowship is not an external agreement to associate, but communion, harmony, unity of mind and spirit... Fellowship with God is not just a technicality — not just a form — not just the accepting of certain beliefs or joining a certain group. It is a way of life — a thinking like God, a walking in harmony with His revealed will and commands" (G.V. Growcott, "Fellowship with Him", pp. 274,277; see also J. Marshall, "The Living Ecclesia", *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 108, No. 1280 — Feb. 1971 — pp. 55,56).

We do not make the rules governing this fellowship, nor for that matter did our "pioneer brethren" in the last century! "Fellowship" is not like "the law of the land", with higher courts of human judges, case histories to memorize, and a confusing array of legal precedents established before we were born.

True Biblical fellowship is a way of life, a life renewed in the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. Each brother and sister shares the fellowship of a common bond, an awareness of God's love and mercy in Christ extended toward *all* Christ's brethren. For a brother to claim oneness with Christ, but to treat lightly or harshly his oneness with his brethren, for each of whom Christ died, is to miss the mark entirely. A brother acting in an unloving or unforgiving way toward another brother may suppose that he is cutting that person off from true fellowship, and perhaps making his own position more secure. But in reality he is violating the supreme law of his Savior's life, the law confirmed by his shed blood; he is loosening the bond of love and forgiveness that binds him to Christ, for:

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (4:20).

* * * * *

“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1:4).

This is the whole purpose of John’s epistle — to exhort to a *meaningful* faith that results in a joyful life, not to recount a form of words without power. Joy is the great identification, the “secret ingredient” of the Truth that defies the art of the apothecary. Do we confuse the “counterfeit” fellowship of rules and laws and prohibitions with the “real” — a life of loving service, of openness and warmth? Rules are necessary in a certain measure, but they must be applied with love and joy, in the spirit of unity and cooperation; otherwise they become a dead Pharisaic letter to those who observe them. Love and joy must cast out fear — the unscriptural fear of contamination that hides behind legalities and never realizes the “joy” which is at the heart of the Truth! Jesus touched the defiled, the dying, and the dead with impunity, because the power of light and joy was stronger than darkness and fear. It is not that from without which defiles the spiritual man, but if within his heart there has never been engendered the *joy* of the Truth — a joy that flows out to embrace others, to seek peace and unity and mutual edification — then he is “defiled” indeed!

* * * * *

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1:6,7).

In keeping with our theme, it must be noted here that the emphasis is upon “walking”. We reveal whether or not the Truth has made an impression upon us by our personal conduct, by the extent our lives have been transformed by the Spirit-power of the word and prayer. “Light” undoubtedly does originate in true beliefs, but true beliefs are not an end in themselves — as may be mistakenly supposed if one’s life in the Truth has been one long continuous “warfare” against error. Let us beware of imbalance here; let us also beware of misapplication of such verses as these, to justify an extreme position.

Another point arises from verse 7: The conditional portion of the sentence specifies that we must “walk in the light *as he is in the light*.” If we take a rigid “fellowship” stand on such a passage as this, then let us be honest: Let us realize that a comparison with God and Christ in regard to “light” places us *all* — every one — *on the wrong side!* Alongside God and the perfect man, we are, relatively speaking, all in “darkness”, and if “darkness” nebulously defined is the ground of excommunication, then none of us deserves fellowship with God and Christ. But of course, this is true! None of us *deserves* to be included in God’s Family; it is the gift of God. Let us wrap ourselves in the robe of *His* “light”. It is a warming, cheering, health-giving, joyful blanket of love and hope. Here is the “fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

14. The Lost Sons (Luke 15)

“The three parables of Luke 15 are treated as one, for introducing them Luke wrote: ‘He spake this parable (not parables) unto them’ (v. 3). Each parable adds to the one that went before it, so that they follow one upon another without specific introduction (vv. 8, 11). They illustrate three different aspects of one subject: The work of redemption. Consider the different causes of the loss in the three parables. The sheep was lost through its own action; it strayed from the shepherd through curiosity or desire for better pasture. The coin was lost, not through its own fault, but that of the woman who possessed it. The son was lost through deliberately, willfully, and consciously leaving the house of his generous father, and squandering the inheritance granted him. The first represented a one per cent loss of the flock; the second, a ten per cent loss of the woman’s hoard; the third, a fifty per cent loss of the family. These figures are significant. They suggest that whilst comparatively few may stray through curiosity or desire for better pasture, the greater number are lost by the carelessness of others, whilst even more leave through wilful, fleshly desire. Now consider the three mediums of reconciliation in each parable. The shepherd represents the Lord Jesus; the woman, the ecclesia; and the father, Yahweh. The first parable centers attention on the loss, the second on the search, the third on the restoration, so that the dominant verbs throughout are ‘lost, seek, find, and rejoice’. If these principles are kept in mind whilst the parables are studied, many wonderful points of exhortation will be revealed” (H.P. Mansfield, “The Parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Silver, and Lost Son”, *The Story of the Bible*, Vol. 10, No. 7 — March 1967 — p. 108).

The reason for Christ’s use of the three related parables of Luke 15 is given in v. 2, where the Pharisees are heard to murmur, “This man *receiveth* sinners, and *eateth* with them.” Here was a question of “fellowship”; this itinerant preacher,

this rabbi who was soliciting their discipleship, was asking them — the “separated ones” — to follow his example in taking to their bosom “sinners” of every sort! It was absolutely unthinkable!

The third of the three parables is usually known as “The Prodigal Son”. I call it “The Lost Sons” (plural) because, in actual fact, at the beginning *both* of the sons were lost. Like the one hundredth sheep, the younger son was lost *outside* the fold, away from home. But, like the tenth coin, the elder was “lost” *inside* the house. He never strayed physically from his father, but his mind and his heart were miles away!

The parable of the lost sons introduces personal factors that cannot be found in the two preceding parables.

“A sheep might realize it is lost — but it cannot rise to any sense of folly in having strayed” (John Carter, *Parables of the Messiah*, p. 233).

And a coin is completely without thought or feeling. But both sons are capable of realizing their relative positions in regard to the father; they are both capable of repentance, and of taking the initiative to bridge the gap. Whether the elder brother ever succeeded in aligning himself with the mind of his father is the lingering, unanswered question at the close of the parable. And it was the question that lingered in the air, from that day forward, for every one of the proud Pharisees who heard the story.

There is a great urgency of love and reconciliation in Christ’s picture of the waiting and watching father, as he daily and even hourly stares down the road, looking for the familiar figure. There is not one shred of formality or legality in his reception of his returning son. Even while he is a great way off, his father sees him, and with compassion, runs and falls upon his neck and kisses him (v. 20).

“He did not stand upon his dignity, or remain coldly aloof demanding proof of repentance. He did not force an apology. He loved him and he wanted him back and he was willing to forget the past and hope for the future. He showered every display of affection and attention upon him, in his intense joy at reconciliation” (G.V. Growcott, “His Father Ran and Kissed Him”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 48, No. 5 — May 1960 — pp. 158,159).

Here is the divine example for the ecclesial attitude toward any sinning brother who makes the first, faltering steps toward repentance. The members should never question the sincerity of those who seek to return (for they would not like their own sincerity to be questioned), nor should they make the barriers to fellowship more difficult for such than for new converts. The ecclesia should *rejoice* in that the withdrawal of fellowship collectively administered has by God’s grace achieved its hoped-for outcome: the reclamation of the one who has strayed.

In this consideration of the parable we shall concentrate upon the attitude of the elder son, so that at all costs we will avoid his failings. When the younger brother had returned and been received by the father, the elder “was angry, and would not go in” (v. 28). He chose to absent himself from his brother’s feast with the father. In the spiritual application of the parable, he not only put his repentant brother “out of fellowship” but also all those who were “in fellowship” with his brother! In a “clean sweep” he rejected all that sat down to eat with him. But in drawing such a rigid line between himself and his brother, he accomplished one other thing: he unwittingly placed himself *outside the father’s house!*

The elder brother rudely voiced his own righteousness in rather extravagant terms: “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment” (v. 29). Here is the extreme Pharisaical attitude that often goes arm in arm with the “touch not, handle not” school of “fellowship”: “I thank thee, Lord, that I am not as other men, especially this miserable sinner.”

“How ungracious the older brother seems in contrast with his father’s love! But it did not seem so to him. He felt quite justified in his self-righteous indignation. He had no qualms at distressing his father, or marring the joy of reconciliation. He could only see one point of view and that was that he had worked hard and faithfully and here was this returned wastrel being shown favours that he had never received” (Growcott, *ibid.*, p. 159).

How could the elder son claim perfect obedience? It was impossible. And even as he stood there in his bitterness and jealousy, he was at that very moment disobeying the father’s will! May it never be our folly to stand upon our “accomplishments” and blindly overlook, at our very fingertips, the simple work we have left undone: that is, reconciliation with our brethren.

“And yet thou never gavest *me* a kid, that I might make merry with *my* friends.” The elder son, just like the younger, had associates outside the family circle, characters that he had not brought to his father’s table. This in itself suggests

something less than a perfect obedience. And how true it is, that when we measure ourselves against our brethren, and say secretly, “*I am better than he*”, we are really only saying, “*I was smart enough never to sin openly!*”! But we have *all* sinned — of this there can be no doubt. It is fatal to look upon one’s own sins as not being as “serious” as another’s.

The elder contemptuously disclaimed kinship with the younger in v. 30: ‘He may be *your* son, but he is not *my* brother’, he seems to be saying. But the father patiently and gently responds, “For this *thy brother* was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (v. 32). ‘He is *your* brother and my son, whether you disown him or not!’ It is certainly not without significance that the fatted calf (the special sacrifice of communion typifying Christ) was slain on behalf of the repentant sinner, not the proud “Pharisee”! How tragic it is that by his own hateful words the elder son admits that the “fatted calf” is not for him! He could have shared in it with his brother if only he had swallowed his pride and come into the house!

So we see in the elder brother some rather unlovely characteristics. May they never, even subconsciously, be ours! Here is unbridled jealousy: bitterness at the inclusion of his brother in his own previously exclusive benefits. Here is also greed, the latent fear: ‘He has already thrown away (on harlots, a gratuitous assumption — or was it true?) one-half (or one-third?) of your property, and now he wants mine!’

All that the elder brother had he had received from the father. Should he not go out of his way now to welcome his brother (thus pleasing the father)? There is joy in heaven, with the *Father* and His angels, when one sinner repents (vv. 7, 10). What might the Father think of us, if we are angry or jealous or proudly aloof upon an occasion that gives Him joy?

The theme of the Pharisaic attitude toward repentance and reconciliation, which begins with Christ’s three parables in Luke 15, continues through the next two chapters, providing other insights into the mind and character of the brother who was “lost” while still “at home”:

16:13: “No servant can serve two masters.” In his scarcely hidden concern for wealth and privilege, the elder son was demonstrating that he was not a single-minded servant of the Father. He was really a clandestine servant of “mammon”, a “hireling” who sought his own reward (John 10:12,13), not a son who rejoiced above all else in the work of the Father.

16:15: “And he said unto the Pharisees: ‘Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.’ “

17:3-5: “Take heed to yourselves” — Examine yourselves as severely and more so than you examine others. If your brother trespasses, then rebuke him; but always stand ready to forgive him — not just once or twice, but *seven times in one day* if need be! And the apostles, recognizing that such an attitude requires faith, pray Jesus to increase their faith. It is for us from time to time to exercise this kind of faith — faith that, despite perplexing problems, all things *will* work together for the good of Christ’s ecclesias; faith that our brethren will by God’s mercy stand firm in the faith despite ever present failings; faith that God will realize His plan *without* our constant brooding and worrying, or our presumptuous intervention in matters that do not directly affect us. Can we not develop such faith that God will do His part? This is the faith that pleases God, and without which He *cannot* be pleased!

17:10: “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.’ “ Here is the reason for the command that we should receive repentant sinners, and for the command that we should seek reconciliation with our brethren despite their imperfections: *we are ALL unprofitable servants*; the most we can possibly do is but our duty. Our Father has for each of us an inheritance infinitely greater than we could ever earn. Let us not be found in the position of appearing to deny that inheritance to others who have, in the last analysis, applied for it upon the same basis as we: not by works — lest any man should boast — but by the unlimited mercy of a loving Father.

15. The True Vine (John 15)

“The figure of a vine and its branches is perhaps the best illustration of the intimate union between Christ and his followers. That of the shepherd and sheep gives us the thought of intimacy, but it is that between a guardian, who is of a superior order, and creatures of an inferior grade whom he watches over and protects. That of a husband and wife gives the idea of intimacy and union between two beings of the same order, but they are two persons with independent lives, and one of them lives on though the other one has died. That of the head and members illustrates one life common to the whole body, but it falls short in not being able to express the constant putting forth of new growths” (R. Wright, “The True Vine”, *The Dawn Ecclesial Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 3 — March 1961 — p. 65).

The picture of the vine — as our brother says, the best illustration of our intimate union with Christ — can teach us something about Biblical fellowship. Christ's words are simple yet profound: "I am the true vine" (v. 1). It is significant that our Lord does not say, "I am the *stem*, and ye are the branches" (cp. v. 5). Rather, the whole plant is Christ, and we as the branches are a part of the whole — not just attached to Christ, but *part of Christ!* Such an expressive statement gives sledge-hammer force to the warning of Christ in Matthew 25:40,45:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto ME."

We should be extremely reluctant to cut off our brethren, and no better reason can be given than this: that through lack of love and patience we may find ourselves *cutting off Christ!* This is analogous to the comical picture of the man in the tree who is so busy pruning that he inadvertently saws off the limb on which he is sitting. Comical indeed, naturally speaking; but the spiritual counterpart is a great tragedy. How many lives have been blighted by what in the beginning was an earnest (if misdirected) zeal for "purity", but the outcome was the separation of the zealous remnant from any hope of nourishment that it could have received through the remainder of the vine! Children in the separated families have found this self-imposed isolation spiritually withering; their links with a healthy ecclesial life were never fused; when grown they drift away in far greater numbers than their counterparts in the "loose" ecclesias from which their parents withdrew!

Christ continues: "My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit *he taketh away*" (vv. 1,2). In this analogy the "branches" are pruned *only* by the Father. This is not to deny, of course, the Scriptural duty of ecclesias in extreme situations to take the initiative and to "purge out the old leaven". However, as has been seen previously (Chapter 13), we all too often lose sight of the fact that usually it is better for the faithful ecclesial to wait until the Father, in His providence and infinite wisdom, severs the diseased or dead branches from its midst. (Compare also the lesson of the seven "stars" in Revelation 1:16 — see Chapter 6.)

The central exhortation of Christ's parable in John 15 is found in v. 4: "*Abide in me.*" Each branch must abide in the vine in order to bring forth fruit. If for any reason it is severed, the branch may continue in existence for a time — but in the day of reckoning the "husbandman" will gather it together with the other lifeless sticks and cast them into the fire of eternal destruction (v. 6).

All of the emphasis here is upon our duty, our necessity, to attach ourselves solidly to the true vine, and never to relinquish our grasp. A dog with a bone was crossing a bridge one day, when he chanced to glance down and spy his reflection in the water. Thinking this to be another dog, and a rival claimant for his bone, he bared his teeth and let out a growl and a ferocious bark. Unfortunately, in the process he dropped his bone, which sank irretrievably to the bottom of the stream.

Like that dog, we sometimes forget who our real enemy is, and in giving our attention to fighting a supposed enemy we may lose our grip on the prize. Christ has wisely advised us to hold firm to *our* hope, and not to worry too much whether *someone else* should have a right to that same hope. Unlike the dog's bone, there is food enough for all in Christ; the "branches" need not squabble among themselves.

This teaching, of what should be our proper attitude toward our fellow "branches", is emphasized further in v. 16. Christ says, "Ye have not chosen me, but *I* have chosen you." The one who chooses is the one who holds the right subsequently to refuse!

What a sad and confusing spectacle we have today in the ecclesial world: a host of "independent" branches, each one jealously pruning away whole branches and grafting other branches back in their place, as if to say, 'We alone are *the people*, and wisdom will die with us.' (In fact, some of these smaller communities are near extinction because of continuous division and subdivision in pursuit of that elusive "purity".) But all the while — since the fundamental beliefs of each "branch" are sound — they are *all* attached to the One Vine (though some "branches" imply by their rhetoric that their rivals are really attached to "brambles").

Let us return to the wholesome picture of the true vine. In this ecclesial network it is our business, wherever we may be, to send out new shoots, to grow and consolidate — so that others through us may receive sustenance from Christ the one vine. Practically speaking, we must endeavor always to strengthen our bonds with brethren in our local ecclesia, with brethren in isolation, with other ecclesias near and far. The vine of the Truth must be an intricately woven web of spiritual relationships, through all of which flows life from Christ! We must not be afraid thus to send our more "feelers" and bind ourselves closer and closer together with our brethren. The more we seek to be "one" with our brethren, both in joys and sorrows, the healthier will be our attitude toward fellowship. Where true love exists, misunderstandings and suspicions will

be much less frequent. We may still periodically have to remove “dead” or destructive members from our midst, but if we are living up to this standard it will be a truly painful experience — as it should be! It will not be something that affords us a secret pleasure in the contemplation of our own “superiority”. A full appreciation of our interdependent relationship with *all* our brethren will serve as a necessary check upon the traditional divisive tendencies of Christadelphia.

16. Christ’s Prayer for the United Ecclesia (John 17)

Christ’s great intercessory prayer, recorded in John 17, is the most intimate outpouring of the Son’s heart to the Father that is recorded in all of the Bible. The apostles heard the words as they followed their Master, but the thoughts were too deep for them at that stage. In a way, perhaps, we today are just as unprepared for the crystal clarity, the uncompromising perfection implicit in his words:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”

Elaborating on the request first uttered in v. 11 (“that they may be one”), Christ repeats this wonderful prayer four more times (vv. 21 — twice, 22, and 23). It must be to the great embarrassment of strict separatists that this particular aspect is so emphasized in this place. But never mind how difficult, how humanly impossible it appears, this unity is an *achievable goal*, with Christ’s help.

“‘That they all may be *ONE*.’ Here the word ‘one’ is not masculine, but neuter, and probably presupposes ‘one Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12:13) or ‘one Body’, for both of these are neuter nouns. No matter. ‘That they *all* may be one....that the world may believe that thou hast sent me’ (v. 21). Instead they are not all one, not by any means as much as they might be. And if the world quizzically comments: ‘How these brethren in Christ love one another!’ it is certainly not helped to believe in the Christ they all honour” (H. Whittaker, “Block Disfellowship”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 43, No. 513 — Sept. 1973 — p. 343).

“The only way that believers can show that they dimly perceive the immensity of what Jesus sought from his Father, is to make this harmony of love and consideration so real in their individual and ecclesial lives that people of the world recognize it as the practical manifestation of the life and teaching of Jesus — even though they themselves may not always respond to it. Particularly in this way is the Master glorified in his household.

“The conscious and deliberate effort of every member of an ecclesia is needed to preserve this divine unity: it has to be a community effort. The joy of it is that Jesus is part of this cooperation. He *knows* that difficulties will arise in ecclesias; he knows that it is only by ‘getting together’ that ecclesias can solve difficulties; that is why he promised, in case of dispute, to be ‘in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18:20). Why do we so frequently forget, or ignore this?” (J. Marshall, “The Living Ecclesia”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 108, No. 1280 — Feb. 1971 — p. 54).

17. Causing Divisions (Romans 16:17,18)

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

The first thing we learn from this passage is that “divisions” are not always good! Perhaps this is a point not worth laboring for most, but it is a sad fact that some brethren look upon divisions as desirable courses of action in almost every circumstance. Their cries of ‘first pure, then peaceable’ are heard far and wide as they proceed, time after time, to tear apart the flock of God. Division and subdivision reaches its ultimate in families meeting in homes, or even fragments of families in separate rooms of the same house.

In Romans 16:17 divisions (the word can also signify dissensions and party spirits, without official excommunication) are grouped with other offences against the apostolic doctrine. How ironic that, in misdirected zeal for ‘pure doctrine’, so many have overstepped the bounds of Christ’s doctrine in the opposite direction!

Another point worth mentioning is that Paul advises the brethren to “mark out” and “avoid” those who *cause* divisions (1 John 2:19 again), not those who would follow them. The reason for taking special notice of the *causers* is that they may deceive the “simple” (v. 18). This is a distinction comparable to that between the wolves and the sheep in Christ’s parable of John 10. The wolves must be marked out, branded for what they are, for their own possible reclamation if for no other reason. *They are the ones to be wary of!* The simple sheep must be protected, not lumped together with the wolves and all alike avoided. To avoid the sheep because they *might* be guilty, and because we *might* be guilty by association with them, is to go further than the apostle ever intended.

Robert Roberts was not the exponent of wholesale divisions that some latter-day Christadelphians would insist. He recognized that some divisions were inevitable and necessary, but his view was far from one-sided:

“There are divisions that are uncalled for, *and therefore sinful*. Paul refers to such when he says: ‘Mark them that cause divisions among you contrary to the doctrine (the teaching on unity) that ye have learnt.’ He was referring, no doubt, to the factions arising out of personal preferences, but the warning applies to all divisions that ought not to be made. There is division enough, in all conscience — division that is inevitable — division that must be, unless we are to ignore divine obligations altogether; but there are divisions that ought not to be. It is possible to go too far in our demands of fellow-believers. How far we ought to go and where to stop, is at one time or other a perplexing problem to most ear-nest minds” (“True Principles and Uncertain Details”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 35, No. 407 — May 1898 — p. 182).

Pity the poor brethren — for they are “poor” indeed — who have never once really paused to consider whether or not they have gone too far! It would be well for them to remember that confidence is a virtue only when it rests upon God.

18. Is Christ Divided? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

Many times we read Paul’s question here as we do other Scriptures, without considering that it may have application to ourselves. Mankind always has a tendency to worship itself, a tendency that often manifests itself in the slavish adherence to the dictates of some other man. Even Paul acknowledged and used to good purpose this human tendency — as all good preachers must — when he encouraged these same Corinthian brethren to be imitators of him (11:1, RSV). He was in their presence, he was visible, his words and examples were forceful; and it is true that most men are like sheep looking for a shepherd. But the difference between Paul and some leaders was this: that he always kept Christ in the forefront: ‘Follow me, but only insofar as I follow Christ.’

The apostle must have realized that the tendency to believe and follow that which is visible, to follow other men more readily than an unseen Christ, would lead to serious and far-reaching consequences, and result in believers becoming estranged and the Brotherhood divided. The condition of the Corinthian ecclesia presented an opportunity for the suppression of this tendency in its beginning, and to point a warning for all time. The Corinthians were in a dangerous position: While all professed the name of Christ, a sectarian spirit had definitely risen in their midst, threatening to destroy their unity as a part of the Body of Christ:

“Some boasted in Paul, others in Apollos, others in Cephas, and others in Christ. Hence the question: ‘Is Christ divided?’ The anticipated answer is, of course, ‘NO.’ Yet there must be division. It is Christ who says so: ‘Henceforth there shall be division’ (Luke 12:51-53). ‘But did he mean among the elect of God? No. Is it right among them then? It will not happen among them, brother. The saints are of one mind. But who are they? Leave that. The judgment will decide.’ This last quotation is from the late editor Robert Roberts. The present editor endorses his words absolutely, because, on the most careful study of the New Testament, he believes they breathe the spirit of Christ and Paul” (C.C. Walker, “Is Christ Divided?”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 59, No. 693 — March 1922 — p. 122).

The exhortations of the apostles require us to face the facts, to recognize them, and to act with wisdom. We do not hesitate to invite our unbaptized friends to face the facts of our message to them; should we not follow the same principle of guidance for ourselves? Our answer must be in the affirmative. This matter should be brought home to us in the further question: “Of what body am I a member?” Would not all unhesitatingly answer: “We belong to the Body of Christ”? This is as it should be; but are we prepared to face the fact that in so answering we commit ourselves to a condemnation of the present disrupted state of Christadelphia? Certainly we cannot in reason justify it. Christ is *not* divided. “Doth not even nature itself teach us” that it is not possible that members of the same physical body can be separated from one another, and the body structure still retain its form and function? As the Creator has designed both the natural body and the spiritual body (His ecclesia), their adaptation to His purpose in their respective unities must necessarily follow His design. Thus

should the Brotherhood, notwithstanding the varied character of its membership — young and old, rich and poor, “liberal” and “conservative” — be one body in Christ, in which there should be no schism.

All who are agreed upon the simple first principles of the Faith, and have been truly baptized into the name of Christ, have acknowledged Christ as their “Head”. To be consistent, we should therefore confess that the present condition of Christadelphia proves false our profession. What is the matter? Who is in the wrong? Should not the whole body of believers be unitedly holding to the “head”? The “head”, “from which the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16)? The apostle Paul in yet another place calls attention to “Christ our life” (Col. 3:4). Can Christ be the “Life” of a mutilated body, whose members are not only severed but also in active opposition to one another?

“ ‘Is Christ divided?’ Paul asked in amazement; that is, did they not realize what their party loyalties in effect signified? — namely, that the unique and glorified Christ could be parcelled out among rival groups as though he were a mere thing and not the sublime being who alone had made them what they were by his sacrificial death on their account! Then, to drive the point home, come two equally decisive questions, ‘Was *Paul* crucified for *you*? or were ye baptized in the name of *Paul*?’ “ (W.F. Barling, *The Letters to Corinth*, p. 68).

What then is our position as the Body of Christ? Most surely, brethren, we should come together, and in all humility and brotherly love have these matters set right, before the day of opportunity passes forever, so that *all* who truly belong to Christ may be a united, living band, awaiting his return.

Just think how it would be — speaking of his return — if the Lord were to appear incognito in our midst at this very moment! Would he be received by all portions of the Brotherhood without question, or would there be “righteous” concern that he who is “in fellowship” with one faction cannot be “in fellowship” with another, for fear of “contamination”? Would such “contamination” be feared by the One who while yet in the flesh touched sightless lepers and naked demoniacs and foul corpses?

Let us think of two brethren working side by side, both having been baptized into Christ, and yet they act as if they were strangers to one another. Circumstances have placed them in separate “fellowships”, and they find between them a great gulf not of their own making. The situation is painfully embarrassing and unpleasant. How would it be if the Lord, their Head, were to stand with them one day, his true identity hidden? He converses with them; he finds (for he knew he would find) the knowledge of the Truth, much zeal, and love, on both sides. The Master is pleased, and graciously reveals himself to them. With both joy and regret, and confusion, these two brethren stand in the presence of their Lord. ‘O fools, and slow of heart to truly *believe* in me... why have you been satisfied with *my* body divided? Did you really think I would be pleased with such a condition? Now I beseech you, before it is too late, that there be no divisions among you.’

The time to retrace our steps in *now!* Let us make a special effort, not just lip-service, to this ideal of unity. Let us not be ashamed when Christ does come, that he will say, “I have somewhat against thee.” Rather let us reasonably, prayerfully, conscientiously, and in humility of spirit set ourselves and our house in order, as best we can, before it is too late. Christ must not be divided among us.

19. Did Jesus “Fellowship” Judas?

This is the sort of question for which there is no provable answer, if by “fellowship” is meant merely the technical participation in the “Last Supper”. A reasonable reading of the four gospel narratives leads to the conclusion that Jesus did indeed break bread with Judas, knowing full well his traitorous intentions. Brothers Thomas and Roberts both subscribed to this view, as their writings show. But nowhere do the records specifically spell this out.

The partaking of the emblems, however, is not the actual issue. We know that Jesus *would have* broken bread with Judas, even if it is felt that Judas in fact excused himself and went out before that point in the evening’s activities. We know this because Jesus did wash the feet of Judas, as well as the other eleven. We know that because Jesus offered the sop to Judas. (This was traditionally a mark of great love and esteem, for the host to give the choicest morsel in the common bowl to a special guest.) Indeed, we know this by a simple observation: for more than three years Judas ate and slept and traveled with Jesus and the other apostles, and never once did Jesus do or say anything that might have led the others to suspect that Judas was the one who would betray him. These were all instances of “fellowship” just as much as the symbolic common partaking of bread and wine; all together, they show that Jesus had admitted a man whom he knew to be a hypocrite into the innermost circle of his companionship for an extended time.

In 1847, *after* learning the Truth and being baptized, Brother John Thomas was the subject of certain charges made by the hierarchy of the Campbellite (“Church of Christ”) congregations. They demanded that Brother Thomas leave the “fellowship” of their congregations, because his “Confession and Abjuration” (written March 3, 1847) implied that many members of those congregations did not believe the full gospel. At such a demand Brother Thomas became highly indignant and fired off the following reply:

“Without comparing you [some of the Campbellite “brethren”] to Judas, I would inquire, Was not he in his sins when Jesus broke the loaf with him as well as the rest of the twelve? This will be a sufficient quid pro quo, that I necessarily abjure churches, because there are those among them who on my principles are in their sins.... There are many in the American reform-churches who believe in....the ‘immortality of the soul’. We have learned, however, the important lesson of bearing and forbearing with one another, in hope that all will come to see the real truth.... But your dogma is that I ought to reject them.... We, however, do not think so” (From a personal letter, quoted by Robert Roberts in *Dr. Thomas: His Life and Work*, 1954 Edition, p. 168).

We must not, of course, suppose that Brother Thomas retained such a “liberal” view of “fellowship” for the rest of his days. There did come a time when it was desirable from his viewpoint, as well as those who made him their enemy, that he no longer be affiliated in any sense with the “reform” churches. But we might note with care that this was at least two years after his true immersion into the hope of Israel. And at any rate his point about Judas may be well taken, as far as it goes, even by us today. We see Brother Thomas as a man much like the apostle Paul, willing to recognize holders of false doctrine as “brethren”, so long as there was reasonable expectation of their further enlightenment and reform.

Robert Roberts, in his “True Principles and Uncertain Details”, says:

“Judas was a thief and Jesus knew it, but tolerated him till he manifested himself. Was Jesus responsible [i.e. for Judas’ sins] while he fellowshipped him? Certainly not” (*The Christadelphian*, Vol. 92, No. 1097 — Nov. 1955 — p. 417).

20. “Let a Man Examine Himself” (1 Corinthians 11)

In his letter to the Corinthian ecclesia, the apostle Paul attempts to set right several difficult local problems— of which one was the attitude and manner in which the brethren were celebrating the Lord’s Supper. In stating the divine principles concerning the memorial, he exhorts us as well.

“Take, eat; this is my body” (11:24). The words originally spoken by Christ had a two-fold meaning; Paul perceives this and endeavors to pass it along. The bread represented the literal body of Christ, and it represented the spiritual “body” also— those who in sincerity and truth believe and obey Christ’s teachings, which are the “bread of life”. It is certainly no coincidence that the chapter concerning the memorial feast is followed by observations and instructions regarding the many-membered Body consisting of Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, all given one life through Christ their head (1 Cor. 12).

Brethren in this age, just as their forerunners in the first century, when assembled for the solemn meal, should listen for the words of consecration spoken *over them*, and not just over the literal body, by the One who walks in the midst of the lampstands: “*This is my body.*”

It follows that the ecclesia cannot properly be the Body of Christ when it is beset by separations, schisms, ill will, and turmoil (11:18, 19). How best can such wrongs be avoided? By bearing in mind, as Paul continues, that the bread and wine are taken in remembrance of Christ (vv. 24, 25). If everything is centered upon him, then troubles of all sorts will diminish.

And not just in token of Christ’s life, but especially because of Christ’s death, as the passover lamb without blemish (John 1:29), is this meal instituted. “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew *the Lord’s death* till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26). The “shewing” is a “setting forth”, after the order of the Jewish Passover, a solemn proclamation to all who are in the house, as well as to “the stranger who sojourns with thee” (Exod. 12:48). It is an intensely personal rite— though it may be observed as part of a large group: “This is done because of that which the Lord did unto ME....” (Exod. 13:8).

The personal aspect of the memorial is intertwined with the corporate, just as in the other rite enjoined upon all believers— baptism. True, each has its pluralistic qualities. By the one, a believer enters the Body of Christ; by the other, he regularly reaffirms his standing there. But each rite is essentially an individual one, as was the offering of sacrifice at tabernacle or temple— the closest approach by the single soul to communion and oneness with God, to fellowship of the sufferings of His Son.

Paul stresses that, if each individual believer will fully enter into this spirit of the Lord's Supper, then the schisms and doubts and disruptions of the Body as a whole will be minimized, perhaps even eliminated. Those who seek to please themselves, whether by self-indulgence (as in Corinth) or self-exaltation (remember the Pharisee who prayed in the temple!), are not truly "looking unto Christ". What they do, then, they do unworthily, and "are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). In effect, they have said with the rabble before Pilate's judgment seat, "We have no king but Caesar, the 'god of this world'. This man's blood be upon us!" In short, any partaking of the emblems is an unworthy, or vain, pretense if he who eats and drinks does not always see "Christ crucified" (1:23); that is, if he does not see the reason for his Lord's crucifixion, which is... *his own sins*. All this is so "that no flesh should glory in his presence" (v. 29). The memorial meeting is not the time nor the place (is there ever one?) for one sinner to attempt to criticize the lives of his brethren.

A contemplation of one's own sinfulness and consequent need for redemption is surely sufficient to occupy fully the mind of the saint at the Lord's Supper. "Let a man examine *himself*, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11:28). Certainly Paul is here alluding to that first supper:

"And as they did eat, he said, 'Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.' And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, 'Lord, is it I?' " (Matt. 26:21,22).

It is possible still for the disciple to betray his Master. He who falls away from the Truth, who allows the soil of his heart to bear again its natural thorns and briars, is crucifying to himself the Son of God afresh, putting him to an open shame (Heb. 6:6,8). He is treading under foot the holy blood of the covenant (10:29), even as swine heedlessly trample pearls in the mud (Matt. 7:6). It is indeed better for such a one never to have known the way of life than, having known it, to insult and outrage the precious Spirit of grace mediated by Christ. 'I would never do such a thing,' is the instinctive reaction. But that is just the point! None of us is immune from just such a falling away; the wolves of the world follow hard behind the flock of Christ, and the stragglers are swiftly torn apart. Christ must speak to each of us, in the bread and wine; his eyes must gaze into ours and turn our vision inward. 'One of you will betray me.' 'Are you speaking of me? Lord, is it I? Give me strength that it be not so. Lord, I am so weak. Let me cling close to you. Purge from me all that offends you, so that I betray you not in thought or deed.' Surely here is the only correct attitude for each of us who assemble to the memorial meal: all of us together constituting "One Body" but each steadfastly examining himself alone in the light of the Perfect Example. Not "Who is he that would betray Christ?" but instead, "Is it I?"

"The most pressing and urgent lifelong consideration of any who aspire to the kingdom of God must be their own complete personal transformation of character. The realization of this urgent necessity is far too dim among us. This is our foremost ecclesial concern, and the root of most ecclesial problems.

"Any attempt to judge, criticize or regulate the lives and conduct of *others* — until we have brought *ourselves* into line with the commandments of God in this respect — is *hypocrisy*.

"We tend to feel, or at least to act as though we feel, that if we can legislate righteousness upon others, and surround ourselves with the external appearance of a sound ecclesial framework, then our own personal shortcomings will somehow be absorbed, and overlooked, and compensated for, in the general ecclesial strength. We tend very much to get our priorities in this respect completely reversed. Jesus said:

'Thou hypocrite; first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye' (Matt. 7:5).

"We shall find that the more attention and concern we give to our own very numerous shortcomings, the less will be the vehemence of our zeal to condemn our brethren, and the more cautiously, and gently, and Christ-likely shall we approach that task.

"Let us, then, frankly examine our own conduct and characters in the light of the plain, simple commands of Scripture, and see if we are in any position to presume to operate on the eyes of others.

"Let us judge, and suspect, and expose *ourselves* at least as critically as we so eagerly judge and suspect and expose others. Rather, indeed, let us judge ourselves far more searchingly than we judge others, for this is the prescribed course of Scripture, of wisdom, and of love. The divine command is:

‘Let a man examine.... HIMSELF’ ”

(G.V. Growcott, “Let a Man Examine Himself”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 60, No. 11 — Nov. 1972 — p. 338).

“For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, *not discerning the Lord’s body*” (v. 29). Those who look too much at the faults, or supposed faults, of their brethren are in danger of doing this very thing. In looking at others rather than themselves and Christ, they are first of all missing the point of the ordinance, and nullifying in their heedlessness the benefit to themselves of the offering of Christ’s literal body. And in so judging others, they may also be tearing the Lord’s spiritual “body” to pieces. He who cannot discern the Lord’s “body” all around him, who sees his brethren and sisters only as so many potential problems of doctrine and practice, is in danger of cutting himself off from them. His “careful” eating and drinking in solitude will then degenerate into a silly smugness, a self-satisfaction that may remove him from the very benefit he thought was exclusively his. “I thank thee, Lord, that I am not as these other men.” But you are like them, and the sooner you realize it the better!

21. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Out of the crowds that followed Jesus, a lawyer stepped forth one day with a question to test the new rabbi: “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 25). Was this a sincere question or another attempt to catch him at his words? Whichever it was, Jesus treated the question and the questioner respectfully. His first answer, however, was not really an answer at all, but rather another question, which turned the testing back upon the lawyer. It would lead him, if he had an open mind, to a searching self-examination of belief and practice: “What is written in the law? How readest thou?” (v. 26).

“And he answering said, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbour as thyself’ ” (v. 27).

It was an excellent answer, showing an insight into the law born of deep and prayerful study. He had thus linked together two commandments from separate parts of the Torah (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). On a later occasion Jesus himself did the very same thing in response to the query as to what was the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:39).

“And Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live’ ” (v. 28).

There is a great gulf between reason and response, between theory and practice, between hearing and doing. To so answer was relatively easy; to do was another matter altogether. And so it is for all of us: Love as a Biblical concept, and the mystical expression of love for God, are often on the lips of His children. But the practical expression of that love is a difficult business.

The lawyer now sought “to justify himself” (v. 29): “Who is my neighbor?” Evidently he thought the first part of the great commandment was no problem for him; after all, what right-thinking, religious person did not love God with all his being? But the penetrating gaze of this rabbi and the finality of his admonition — “This *DO!*” — left even this confident lawyer a trifle uneasy at his position in regard to the second half. In so asking he betrayed the weakness of those who concentrated upon the meticulous observance of the law; he was anxious to know the exact limits of his obligations. Who were those who in his particular situation had claims upon him? Was it not possible that he was already obeying the law— even in this matter?

As he so often did, Jesus answered a question with a parable that at first glance was not an answer at all. It was a story, however, which would be very familiar to his listeners.

A certain man was descending the dreaded “Way of Blood” that led from Jerusalem to Jericho. Though it was a dangerous journey — for the twists and turns of the rocky path offered numerous places for brigands to hide — he traveled alone. And, sure enough, he fell among cruel thieves and was left to die.

It so happened that a priest came down by that way, and passed by on “the other side”; likewise, a Levite. These paragons of sacrifice and ritual would not be detoured from the fulfillment of their duties; with averted eyes they hastened on. One can imagine the many possible ways by which they would have sought to justify themselves in such neglect. Perhaps they were even so close together that each was aware of the other’s failure as well as his own. The priest might have thought: ‘My work is most important; I will let this lesser Levite behind me tend to this rather unpleasant business.’ And the Levite might well have said to himself: ‘The priest did not bother; and his calling to keep the Law is higher than mine; why should I?’ None of us are such strangers to the act of self-justification that these excuses or a dozen like them would seem totally

unreasonable. No doubt we can all recall “reasons” for failing to do our duty that were just as flimsy when later held up to the clear light of Scripture.

And looking upon him, they both passed by on the other side! The lesson is obvious: this man was a “stranger” to them; why should they be inconvenienced by someone who might be a grievous sinner? Indeed, perhaps they feared defilement! ‘We might be partakers of this man’s sins.’ In Christ’s analogy they plainly loved self more than they loved any “neighbor”. This was a fault no less to be rebuked simply because it was induced by a rigid doctrinal view of “holiness”. Their special Bible interpretations added to their *legalistic* duties (“Touch not, handle not the unclean thing”), but those same interpretations sadly detracted from what they should have readily recognized as *practical* duties. The lesson must not be lost on us. (A few years ago an ecclesia planned a special lecture, with considerable advertising. A large number of visitors attended, but of them all only one finally accepted the Truth and was baptized. And she did not attend because of any media advertising, but solely because — on the very day of the lecture — a brother played the part of “Good Samaritan” to a motorist in distress.)

But a certain Samaritan — one of the race despised by the “elite” Pharisaic Jews — happened also to come that way. Having compassion upon the fallen Jew, whom he might have left to his fate with more justification than did the other two, he went to him. Binding up his wounds, setting him on his own beast, he brought him safely to the inn. In so doing, the Samaritan brought upon himself *grave personal danger* — the thieves might have still been around. Furthermore, it was a *messy and troublesome job* to bind up the man’s wounds. And also, he experienced a *real material loss*; two pence was not a small sum (by Matt. 20:2 it would represent two days’ wages).

Christ himself is to be seen in the parable. Surely it is worth noting that his enemies at least once denounced him as a Samaritan (John 8:48), perhaps in reference to the peculiar circumstances of the marriage of Joseph and Mary, or perhaps because of his fearless association with that hated nation (John 4:40, and see also Chapter 29 in this book). Christ is our neighbor, coming near to us in our fallen condition, showing mercy to those who do not deserve it. We have all descended the road of blood toward the city of the curse (Josh. 6:26); we have all been wounded by sin and we have all lain near death. At great personal risk and inconvenience and loss, even at the expense of *legal defilement*, Christ has stopped, and stooped, to help us. He has reinforced that lesson: “Go, and do thou likewise!”

The Samaritan in the parable is pictured as telling the innkeeper, into whose hands he committed the wounded man: “Whatsoever you spend in his care, even if it be more than I have given you, I will repay you” (v. 35). Those who follow his example, even at risk to themselves, who go the extra mile to bear with and help a fallen brother, to bind up wounds in the ecclesia, pouring in the oil of kindness and love.... those who do such things will never lose anything. There is no danger in such a policy of self-sacrifice. “I will repay thee”, are the words of Christ.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32).

“Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21).

And now the lawyer’s question is put to him: “Which of these three was neighbor to the man who fell among thieves?” The answer was inescapable, but even then the fastidious Jew could not bring himself to name the man by race. So instead: “He that showed mercy on him.” A neighbor is one who shows mercy, who offers help and love to those who do not deserve it. Even the most blatant self-interest leads us to love those who love us; there is no special sacrifice in this. True love that emulates the Master must stretch out to include those who may be separated from us. Ceremonial purity may pass by on the other side, holding its garments aloof, that it be not touched by the fallen condition of others. But true love looks upon misfortune, stops to help, binds up wounds, pouring in wine and oil, and walks step by step with those who have fallen, until they all come safely to the inn.

Before we go too far afield to find the neighbors we should love, let us look around us, at a divided, problem-riddled Christadelphia. Let us consider the brethren who hold the Truth just as we do, but who need a helping hand to be bound again to the brotherhood. Let us consider our attitudes toward those “other groups” who may be so close to us in beliefs but whom we put so far away in practice; are they our “Samaritans”?

“The Samaritans were neighbours in the most literal sense, but as for loving them, that seemed impossible. Christ loved them and caused his disciples to marvel at the manner in which he spake to the woman at Jacob’s well and afterwards to others who came out to hear him. The Jews as a whole almost made it a part of their religion to hate the Samaritans, and if they were able to analyze their own feelings they would probably have to admit that the hatred was directly traceable to the fact of their being such *near neighbours*. This is a common weakness of poor

human nature. *Those who are near but not quite with us arouse more bitterness of feelings than complete strangers.* Then when such an evil feeling has been once started, the deceitful heart begins to build up *fancies to justify the hatred*, thus further traducing those who have already been wronged” (I. Collyer, *The Guiding Light*, p. 66).

22. “The Foundation of God” (Num. 16; Psa. 11; 2 Tim. 2)

The names of Korah the Levite and Dathan and Abiram of Reuben stand high on any list of the troublers of Israel. Much can be learned, however, of a negative nature from these men, for their sins were such as (in lesser degrees, one would hope) are common to most of us. Indeed, it might even be said that their sins — rebellion, pride, and jealousy, leading to a divisive, condemning spirit within God’s people — are among the most prevalent in the latter-day development of the brotherhood.

The jealous feeling entertained by Aaron and Miriam against Moses (Numbers 12) culminated in the punishment of leprosy upon the prophetess. Even this striking lesson does not seem to have quelled the rebellious spirit among several prominent men in the congregation of the Lord. Korah, a leading Levite, and two princes of the tribe of Jacob’s firstborn son, leading a formidable delegation, strode boldly before Moses and his brother. “Wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?” (Num. 16:3). The challenge was the offspring of ambition; these were men who aspired to leadership but did not possess the required qualities. The Truth has suffered much from such as these: men who to gratify their own whims of self-importance rend apart united bodies, blind leaders of blind followers who can in one day destroy the work of years of patient building.

“And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face” (v. 4). He must have realized, this man of God, what havoc their presumption would work among an impressionable nation. He naturally feared that the catastrophe he had personally averted on the summit of Sinai, when Israel had rebelled against God’s authority, would now break forth afresh and bring to ruin God’s work in the wilderness.

“Tomorrow the Lord will show who are his” (v. 5). There is no suggestion that the man of God knew what would transpire on the following day. But he must have been confident that in some way God’s will would be made known. The test proposed by Moses was an arraying of the rival leaders with their censers on one side, and the meek Moses and his family on the other. It seems that Korah was eager and confident, feeling that in such a show of numbers, headed by his dignified and impressive self, the easily swayed congregation could not help but choose him and his allies as their new rulers.

“It would seem that this apostasy of Korah had already brought into existence a *rival system of worship* to that centred in the Tabernacle. Two hints in the narrative point to such a conclusion. The leaders of Korah’s company — two hundred and fifty of them — were already each equipped with a censer for the burning of incense, which was the morning and evening duty of the priest only and never of the Levite or the layman. So the organization of another system of worship must already have proceeded to a dangerous extent. There is also repeated reference to ‘the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’ This is the technical word *‘mishkan’*, used of the Tabernacle of the Congregation, and quite distinct from the ordinary word for an ordinary tent (Num. 16:27)” (H. Whittaker, “The Rebellion of Korah”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 32, No. 381 — Sept. 1962 — p. 306).

After Moses had issued his great challenge, the ground heaved beneath their feet. A great chasm like the mouth of Leviathan opened suddenly and engulfed the partisans of apostasy among the nation as they stood arrogantly at the doors of their tents. Simultaneously God’s wrath burned like fire and consumed Korah and his self-appointed priests. One moment they stood there, an impressive assembly of human pride; the next moment they were but charred and unrecognizable corpses. A stunned silence enveloped the camp as the survivors struggled to grasp the implications of these marvelous Divine judgments.

Even now judgment was not at an end. The children of Israel now turned upon Moses and Aaron as though they personally were to blame. “YE have killed the people of the Lord” (v. 41). So again the glory of the Lord appeared, this time threatening the destruction of all the congregation. Only prompt action by Aaron at Moses’ direction stayed the plague of God before it could finish its gruesome work. Nevertheless, 14,700 died in the plague (v. 16:49). It was a sad day for Israel.

Brother Islip Collyer has written an excellent article, keynoted by the question, “What are your aims, agitator?” Therein he has this rather pointed comment:

“If we were to make a parable out of the rebellion of these ancient Levites — if we were to write of brethren M. and A. as the most prominent members of a little community, and brethren K., D., and A. as disaffected members of

the same ecclesia — if we were to put the words of rebellion into modern style, it is to be feared that the circumstances might be recognized in several centres as a sarcastic account of their own local trouble. The parable might even be extended for the benefit of the country as a whole. The man who agitates for the sake of agitation, and changes the nature of his complaints as soon as any attempt is made to pacify him would be recognized by many observers” (“Wayside Letters”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 52, No. 613 — July 1915 — p. 308).

Brother Collyer in this article leaves any conscientious reader with this unsettling thought: Many of those things for or against which he has agitated were, after all, not nearly so important as they first seemed, and the total effect of the turmoil was more bad than good. Many agitators in fact have had as their predominant aim, though perhaps only subconsciously, the satisfaction of self. A gardener finds that he must once in a while turn over the soil and remove the weeds from his little plot. But if he is always “stirring”, the plants will not grow at all. If we find such a gardener in exasperation one day pulling up plants right and left because they are disappointing to him, we might well ask, “What is your aim in so doing?” And he would, no doubt, reply, “To make this the best garden in the community.” “But how does this particular destructive work accomplish that worthy goal?” And if the gardener is true to himself he will have to admit that his fit of temper has accomplished no good, but only left a mess to clean up. Let us weigh our motives carefully before we agitate the vineyard of the Lord, as did Korah and his followers.

* * * * *

“One of the most serious threats to the unity of the nation... was the affair of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. It arose directly because a purely fleshly reasoning caused the men concerned to press their personal importance to the detriment of the good of the nation as a whole. They fell into the error of ‘not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God’ (Col. 2:19). Their action was based upon premises that seemed sound enough: ‘All the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them’ (Num. 16:3). These were the words on the lips of the ‘250 princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown’, men who according to the record, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram ‘took’. Much lies concealed behind those words! One can imagine the secret meetings, the passing on of information from mouth to mouth, the fomenting of trouble, the sowing of discord, and all because Korah, being a son of Levi, desired to play the part assigned to others of his tribe, and Dathan and Abiram thought their tribe, the tribe of Reuben, deserving of greater pre-eminence than that to which God had called them!

“What is the relation of all this to ourselves as a community?... Our heritage is no less [than that of Israel], for the same God is working towards unity in Christ in the Ecclesia, which is both a body and a commonwealth....The people of Israel had a history of fragmentation and division which began in the wilderness and for which there are two principal reasons: Firstly, they had no sense of devotion to the Lord, whose Name was revealed in His mighty acts of power and compassion on their behalf....Their loss of the vision of the Divine glory caused them to yearn for Egypt, and ultimately to refuse to believe that they were the people whom God would bring into the land of His promise. They fragmented because they had no faith in the purpose of their calling.

“The other reason for their disunity was their failure to keep in mind, much less to comprehend the concept of the unity of their people, or to realize that the purpose of God was not with individuals or with tribes as such, but with ‘all Israel’, to whose wellbeing individuals and tribes contributed by playing each their several and necessary parts. Any fellowship other than that which acknowledges that one is our Head and all we are brethren is still, as it has always proved to be, a fellowship of opposition which leads to further fragmentation within the dissident group itself. As far as we can tell from a survey of our own history and that of Israel, there is no exception to this principle” (A. Nicholls, “The Whole Family Which I Brought Up From the Land of Egypt”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 115, No. 1364 — Feb. 1978 — pp. 42,43).

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The fugitive David was beset both by persecutions from without and trials from within. The less-than-spiritual advice that he must often have received from such as Joab is the subject of Psalm 11. This psalm opens with a profound “statement of faith”, as it were: “In the Lord put I my trust.” For David there was no other repository of trust; king and council had turned against him who was the anointed of the Lord. Those whom he sought for succor were caught within the spell of destruction. Eighty-five of the Lord’s holy priests, with their wives and children, lay dead at the hand of a blasphemous Edomite because he, David, had asked for bread. From pillar to post he fled, scarcely able to find a place to lay his head, as the cruel and vengeful Saul breathed down his neck.

But now, worst of all, his friends were working against him — advocating a plan of action that would cause him to abdicate his trust in God. “How say ye this to my soul?” he asks — and then follow the words of David’s counselors, which he quotes back to them:

‘Flee as a bird, David; go to the mountains. Leave this ‘land of promise’ behind you. All it promises you is a criminal’s death. The wicked — like Saul and Doeg — have their bows and arrows primed for action. They’ll kill you and us and say they are doing God service. *If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*’

Such words have always been the sound of retreat for those among God’s people who found the going rougher than they expected. We have all heard such cries of despair in the brotherhood. ‘The foundations of the Truth have been undermined. Let us flee to the “mountains”. Only there can we be safe. There is nothing left in which we can trust.’ It is to David’s everlasting credit that he holds such cowardly advice up to the contempt that it deserves. His courageous words give life and meaning to the statement which opened the psalm: The Lord was indeed his only trust, so much so that external situations could not undermine that faith.

And as for the “foundations” being destroyed, no, never! Perhaps if men trusted in human institutions to perpetuate righteousness, to glorify God’s Name, perhaps then it might be said that in Saul’s Israel the foundations were no more. But, no, neither the judges nor the laws nor even the Tabernacle itself was the “foundation” of Israel. God is the foundation of the upright; He cannot be destroyed — even if all those in authority lose sight of Him and His demands. The tangible manifestations of God’s rule may crumble and fall, or be pulled down by evil men, for they are temporal; but that which is not seen is eternal. The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold and try the children of men (Psa. 11:4). Nothing escapes His notice. At the proper time, in God’s own way, He will deal with any threatening situation. In this simple promise men must put their trust, waiting upon the Lord.

* * * * *

Many centuries have elapsed since the rebellion of Korah and the tyranny of Saul, and we find the imprisoned Paul concerned for Timothy his beloved son in the faith. How should he discharge his responsible duties in the household? Already men like Hymeneus and Philetus were undermining the doctrine of the resurrection and destroying the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17,18). It seemed as though the foundations of the truth were crumbling all around. Was it time to give up hope, to flee like a hireling from the wolves of rebellion and pride and error? No, the answer of the old apostle was clear:

“*Nevertheless* [i.e. despite all the difficulties and problems you see on every side]... *nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure*” (v. 19).

How do we know this, Paul?

‘You have this seal — this guarantee: Men may attempt to subvert, to destroy, and to corrupt God’s Truth, but they cannot succeed. *The Lord knoweth them that are His!* In the proper time the others will be dispensed with.’

Paul’s words echoed those of Moses — “In the morning the Lord will show who are his, and who is holy” (Num. 16:3)— and David — “His countenance doth behold the upright” (Psa. 11:7).

“If we can bring ourselves to realize that all is at all times in the unerring and almighty hand of God, and that we are but a small cog in a vast machine, we shall not be trapped into that self-important anxiety that leads to hastiness and harshness.

“When we see worldliness gaining ground in an ecclesia; when we see modern customs making a mockery of Scriptural ordinances...when we see attendance gradually diminishing and worldly things interfering even on Sunday morning; when we see... that shallow and self-important little minds introduce new crotchets and speculations — we are apt to become despondent and panicky.

“*But why should we?* Did Paul? No! He says:

‘The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are his.’

“And the apostle, far from despondency, sounded out from his prison-cell inspiring words of courage, and patience, and glorious hope. Without bitterness, but with terrible significance, he points out (2:20) that in a great house there are not only vessels of honor, but also vessels of dishonor. If a man will purify himself, he shall be among the vessels of honor.

“This may seem a strange way to give encouragement, but it would help Timothy to realize that ecclesial disappointments and difficulties do not necessarily mean an abandonment by God, but are rather a part of the divine wisdom of trial and probation” (G.V. Growcott, “No Man Stood With Me”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 57, No. 4 — April 1969 — p. 114).

The apostle continues his exhortation to Timothy: “Flee also youthful lusts” (v. 22) — but do not flee the ecclesia! “Avoid foolish and unlearned questions” (v. 23) — but do not avoid the foolish and unlearned brethren who need your counsel now more than ever. Be patient and meek; do not despair. It may be that by your longsuffering instruction some will be brought to repentance who would otherwise have perished in a general apostasy.

In Christadelphian circles, there will probably always be some who agitate for division and subdivision by an appeal for precise interpretations upon “words” and “phrases” that are far beyond the grasp of the average brother or sister. In their hands the gospel is in danger of becoming the province of “experts”, while the ordinary believer must in his confusion choose which of the “expert” disputants to follow. (In that case, however, how can such disputes — even if it be presumed one side is right and the other wrong — be matters of foundation truth, relevant to fellowship, when the ordinary majority can hardly make heads or tails of the arguments?) Such men as these will accuse others of slackness and toleration when they decline to go to the same lengths in denouncing and excommunicating “error”. Paul says, in effect: ‘Never mind such criticism. God knows the feelings that motivate your actions. God knows who are truly His, and He will reveal them in due time.’

23. “Rise Up and Build” (Nehemiah)

Many lessons of a very practical nature might be gleaned from the inspired diary of “the king’s cupbearer” (Neh. 1:11). For the present purposes, however, we shall concentrate on the qualities of character that constituted Nehemiah “a wise masterbuilder” (1 Cor. 3:10) and give us guidelines to do likewise.

Having learned from his brother Hanani (Neh. 1:2) that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and the gates burned (v. 3), Nehemiah pleaded with Artaxerxes for permission to travel to the land of his fathers to promote a reconstruction program (2:1-8). After a long and rigorous journey he finally arrived at Jerusalem; within only three days, ever the tireless worker, he was up and about on an inspection tour of the city and its fortifications. Nehemiah found many adversaries ready to hinder the work (v. 10), while very few were willing to help in the building.

After viewing the desolations, he called the nobles and the priests together and explained his purpose, and how the king had supported him. They were so impressed that their response was immediate, concerted, and sincere — “Let us rise up and build” (v. 18). The work was well organized by Nehemiah, and construction began without delay.

But it did not go perfectly; the characters of Nehemiah and his brethren, like ours, must be tempered by adversity and hardship. There was opposition from the neighboring Samaritans and Gentiles, who used both guile and physical threats in an attempt to intimidate Nehemiah and impede his work. Most troublesome yet, there were internal dissensions: the Tekoite nobles would not “put their necks to the work” (3:5), and the men of Judah were prophets of pessimism (4:10). But Nehemiah did not despair, or lose hope; he maintained his impressive example and cheerful disposition at all times. It was characteristic of this man (and typical of Christ!) that he prayed for the forgiveness of the sins of the people *as though they were his sins too!* “We have sinned”, said he, and he was willing to share in the guilt of his nation, his “ecclesia” (1:6,7). The knowledge of the sins of his brethren did not discourage him, nor impel him to disassociate himself from the work, but only to redouble his efforts to bring the nation to repentance and finish their task. His enthusiasm was infectious, and the great work of repairing the wall was completed in only 52 days (6:15), “for the people had a mind to work” (4:6).

“*The people had a mind to work.*’ When that is condensed into one word, it spells cooperation. The same idea was expressed by the apostles in such terms as ‘one mind’, ‘like-minded’, and ‘with one accord’. This thought should impress us deeply, because it is *the only way possible for an ecclesia to succeed.*

“If we do not work together, our love will grow cold; bitterness and evil speaking will be generated, and if this is augmented by the continual agitation of some crotchet which has been developed by our desire to have our own

way, the foundations of our ecclesia will disintegrate and the whole structure will collapse. We must be on our guard at all times, and examine our purpose and motives....” (G. Gibson, “The People Had a Mind to Work”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 59, No. 12 — Dec. 1971 — p. 354).

Chapter 3 of Nehemiah enumerates 44 teams who begin work on the wall. Each team is assigned *its own portion* to build. Did some complain about the quality of their brethren’s work at other stations? Did others grumble because they could not be everywhere and do everything and supervise? Did some sit down and refuse to help?: ‘We just are not sure that we can approve of all the details of this operation.’ In the divine retrospect on the work of Nehemiah, all such petty hindrances and worries are put to one side. “Let us rise up and build” was the mandate; this call to the men of the city did not admit of any paltry quibbles. The work was too great to let personalities and prejudices and pride stand in the way.

It is the same with us as we strive to fortify God’s “city” today. There may be fears without, fightings within; but each brother, each individual ecclesia has pressing responsibilities near to home. Each of us has his portion of the “wall” to build. No matter what we think of our neighbor’s building, or that “shoddy bit of work” way across on the other side, when the True Masterbuilder comes to inspect the work, each of us will be judged on *his own portion!*

“Every unit of the body must do its part by — ‘...speaking the Truth in love,...growing up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the *effectual working in the measure of every part*, maketh increase of the body unto edifying of itself in love’ (Eph. 4:15,16).

“This is the only formula of a true ecclesia. What we do for our brethren and sisters, is what we do to God. If what we do is dominated by love, all will be well, but if we are not truly motivated by love and kindness in all we say and do, there will be no edification, and no bodily growth, and we will be brought into condemnation, and will never enter the kingdom of God. For, said Jesus,

**‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me’
(Matt. 25:40)”**

(*Ibid.*, p. 355).

24. Hezekiah and the Imperfect Passover (2 Chronicles 30)

The following is a condensation and revision of the article “Conflict of Loyalties”, by H. Whittaker (*The Testimony*, Vol. 38, No. 454 — Oct. 1968 — pp. 377-380).

It was the time of the great reformation that the zeal of Hezekiah had set going. The appeal had gone out to all the tribes of Israel, regardless of boundaries or political loyalties, that they come up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover after the manner of their fathers. And although the messengers of the king had met with much derision and contempt, there were also many in the region of Galilee who responded and came with gladness to join in their new surge of godliness.

But there were hindrances of many kinds, with the result that it was not found possible to hold the Feast at the normal time — the fourteenth of the first month. However, the Law of Moses provided for a second celebration a month later (a kind of supplementary Breaking of Bread!) for the benefit of those who were unclean through contact with the dead or who were away on a journey when the proper time came round. Strictly speaking, neither of these “exceptive clauses” applied to these latecomers from the north. Even less were they a valid excuse for the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

Nevertheless the Feast went forward in the second month with zeal and rejoicing. It was not that king or priests or people were ignorant of what the Law lay down. There was no disposition to cover up or evade the technical infringement with any kind of clever argument. Rather, the issue became quite simply this: ‘Is it better for us and more to the honor and glory of God that we keep the Passover with an irregularity of procedure, or that we do not keep it at all this year?’ Faced with this alternative — especially in such circumstances — the proper decision was obvious.

Yet it was not to be denied that some commandment of the Law was infringed. Had they desisted altogether, still the Law said that the Passover must be kept. Had they kept it in the second month, then they were found guilty of appropriating to themselves the concessions of Numbers 9:10 which clearly did not apply in their case. Also, many of those coming from the north were not ceremonially purified to keep the Passover (2 Chron. 30:18). Here the Law was infringed again in unmistakable fashion. Yet the Feast was kept,

“for Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, ‘The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary’, and the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.”

None would dispute that, infringements and irregularities aside, Hezekiah and the people did the right thing — or, rather, the best thing possible — in the circumstances.

This kind of tension between two conflicting laws and principles of God’s appointing, both of which apply in a given case, is not uncommon. It happened under the Law of Moses, as for example the dilemma of circumcision on the eighth day when it chanced to fall on a Sabbath; Jesus entered into several controversies between the traditional interpretations of the Sabbath law and his own greater law of loving service to mankind.

Similar situations are not unusual in the life of the disciple today. If a young Christadelphian is commanded by his unbelieving parents to miss the Breaking of Bread so as to accompany them on a visit to an aged relative, which commandment does he break: “Do this in remembrance of me”, or “Honor thy father and thy mother”?

Is it right to buy some magazine which will further one’s study of the Signs of the Times if this means giving indirect support to some unrighteous cause which that publication happens to advocate?

Should an ecclesia spend thousands of dollars on the purchase of a fine organ to enhance its worship and praise of God if a quarter of its members believe that this money should be devoted instead, say, to the Bible Mission?

We begin to see now the bearing of the foregoing considerations on the vexed question of fellowship. Without any doubt, division and fragmentation arise because brethren resolve in different irreconcilable fashion yet another conflict of principles:

‘Here is the beginning of apostasy,’ says one; ‘I cannot with clear conscience belong to a community which tolerates such denials of truth; no matter what the cost, the Faith must be kept pure.’ And he gathers round him some of like persuasion and goes away to make a fresh, clean start — until the day when a like situation recurs once more, and then the process begins all over again.

Says another: ‘Here is teaching which grieves me very much and which may well show itself ultimately to be destructive of our Faith. I do not like it. I am worried by it. Then I must do all in my power to counteract it. Since my brethren who are in a better position than I to exercise a good influence do nothing about it, ought I not to withdraw for the sake of purity of the Faith? But then, there is also my responsibility to the rest who do not assess the situation as urgently as I do. These sheep, what shall they do? Have I no duty to them, to nurture and guide and warn them?’

Thus the conflict rages in the minds and hearts of faithful men. Undefined separateness? Or love of the brethren in time of difficulty? This is the great issue. How is it to be resolved? Some have one solution, some another, and the outcome is mutual recrimination and division. Stark tragedy!

What, then, is the right way, and therefore the best way, to resolve this greatest of all spiritual contests for the loyalty of the believer? Whatever decision is reached, it is almost certain that a serious disadvantage will be involved. One evaluation, however, seems quite suitable in facilitating our choice, and this is the test of Jesus: “By their fruits ye shall know them.”

Apply this test, then, to the “purity-at-all-costs” school of thought. What fruits have been gathered from this tree? The largely unchallenged assumption that root-and-branch disfellowship en masse is demanded by the Bible has left a phenomenal trail of Christadelphian wreckage scattered across the past century. Even at the present day several small boats toss on the waves, when united effort to manage one adequate vessel and keep it seaworthy would be an obvious policy of sanity. More than this, an invariable result of every crusade of every secessionist has been a long-sustained campaign of harsh criticism and self-righteous censure against those from whom the separation has been made. “By their fruits ye shall know them!” What a contrast with Daniel who, belonging to a nation hardened in apostasy and riddled with guilt, prayed for them and for himself as though he shared their sin and their condemnation.

So the “separatist” solution has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. But the more “broad-minded” school of thought may also be lacking when “fruits” are considered, for false teachers if allowed to run wild do damage to others as well as themselves, and the lines of demarcation between Truth and Error may become blurred.

Is there an alternative to either of these extremes? As long as an ecclesia holds to a true foundation of faith, that ecclesia should not be abandoned. There may be unfaithfulness latent in any ecclesia, but if the formal basis of fellowship is sound, then as long as faithful brethren exist there, they should continue an unfaltering witness against error. This was the function of the prophets in a decadent Israel, and the counsel of the apostles to ecclesias with doctrinal and moral problems in the first century.

Such an attitude of mind and the solution here proposed can hardly be altogether satisfactory to the out-and-out idealist, but like Hezekiah he must learn to make the best of imperfect situations. The great evils are schism and apathy. Let us shun both, and choose instead the middle road, of loving, careful, unceasing entreaty and witness for truth. If we do this then we have the assurance that Hezekiah had, that God will pardon the failings of those who prepare their hearts to serve Him, even though their service may prove less than perfect.

25. The Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19)

The parables of Christ are beautifully polished jewels, which present an infinite variety of sparkling views. Many lessons both broad and subtle may be suggested from their reverent contemplation. For our purposes one lesson stands out in the parable of the pounds.

Brother John Carter has incisively noted (*Parables of the Messiah*, p. 258) that, in contrast to the talents of a similar parable (Matt. 25:14-30), the pounds were distributed evenly to a large company — indicative of the gift of the gospel itself, bestowed equally upon all who hear. Each recipient was instructed by the nobleman to occupy himself by making gain of his gift. What concerns us especially is the subsequent attitude and actions of the unfaithful servant, of whom we read in Luke 19:20,21:

“And another came, saying, ‘Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept *laid up in a napkin*: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.’ ”

This servant no doubt had the *cleanest pound* of all, but it had not grown! He had not been totally indifferent to his lord’s gift, but his fear of failure had compelled him carefully to “protect” his pound. So he had wrapped it in a cloth and laid it up in some safe place, perhaps checking it from time to time, maybe even bringing it out, like some housewives do with fine silver, to polish and admire it.

Our attitude toward the Gospel truth that we have received can be similar to the attitude of this man. If we are fearful that we may “lose the Truth” and conscious only of “keeping the Truth pure”, then we are in danger of forgetting what we are told to *DO* with it! The gospel is not a frail greenhouse flower that must have just the right temperature and humidity, and just the correct amount of light and water in order to survive. The gospel is very hardy; it is meant like the pound to be carried into the “market” of life, to the highways and byways, and to make gain for its user. We need have no fear for the Truth itself — it springs from God and is impervious to corruption. We must only be careful that we put it to the use for which it is intended.

This same point is subtly made in other parables of Christ — for example, the parables of the sower and the wheat and tares (see Chapter 4 of this book). Is it enough that we as husbandmen of the Lord’s “field” be concerned with the uprooting of “weeds” or “tares”? Is it enough that we keep the field “pure”? There must be at least as much effort — and more, much more — directed toward the *positive* endeavor of sowing the seed. The farmer expects some imperfection in his field, and he puts up with it, knowing that his paramount interest must be in the production of grain. The harvest is soon enough for the last weeds or tares to be separated from the good grain.

It is so simple when we see it this way. But how many frustrated “sowers” have consumed their lives in the Truth in worry and agitation about the “purity” of the “field”, so to speak, and never gotten around to their real duty? Let us strive for a proper balance in our service in the Truth, lest our intolerable and unbalanced attitude condemn us outright before our Judge (Luke 19:22).

26. Elijah on Horeb (1 Kings 19)

James calls Elijah “a man of life nature with ourselves” (5:17, RSV), and nowhere is this more evident than in Elijah’s confrontation with God on mount Horeb. This austere prophet had just been instrumental in a great victory for the honor of the Lord over Baal, on mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). But from the heights of spiritual exaltation Elijah was plunged into the depths of despair when he realized that his great accomplishments had not softened the heart of Ahab, and had served

only to intensify Jezebel's hatred for himself. Fleeing for his life, and yet in his despondency losing all desire to live, he came into the wilderness, to Horeb (19:8). In a pathetic prayer Elijah reveals that he has given up on Israel, and that he sees himself as the only true believer remaining:

“I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (v. 10).

We have all heard such laments as this, generally for much less reason than Elijah's. In the circumstances we may understand his pessimism, but God saw fit to dispel the mistaken notions that led to his negative state of mind. A contemplation of this incident might also cure the state of mind of any brother who, more or less self-righteously, isolates himself from 'less worthy' brethren.

God called Elijah forth from his cave, and paraded before him a tremendous panorama of His power — strong winds, earthquake, and fire. But the Lord was not in these; Elijah saw that something was missing. At last came a still small voice, and Elijah, bracing himself, came out of the cave where he had fled for fear at the previous manifestations. The soft voice had a soothing effect; now at last the frightened prophet felt, when he heard it, the presence of God. Thus was the message driven home to him: God is best known, not in works of judgment, but in the still small voice which calls His people, when properly prepared by adversity, to repentance.

And Elijah was to be that voice!

“Go, return on thy way” (v. 15).

Like Samuel before him, Elijah was carefully taught that wickedness is primarily an affront against God, not against any individual (1 Sam. 8:7); and consequently no man (no matter how “righteous”) has any prerogative to turn his back on his brethren. Elijah must minister to the remnant that remains in Israel; in the midst of gross apostasy he is not to flee in fear, but rather to stand firm for God and provide a rallying point for the sheep of Israel.

“Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him” (v. 18).

How seriously wrong had been Elijah's estimation that there were no righteous ones remaining in Israel. He had let his despair get the better of his judgment and he had forgotten his responsibility. It was one thing to stand strong against entrenched error on Carmel, but he had not been perceptive enough to see his duty afterward, to strengthen those who remained faithful against the evil in the midst of the nation.

This verse is cited by Paul in his letter to the Romans, with the comment that “God hath not cast away his people” (Rom. 11:2). It is a thought worth remembering for all time: God knows in every age who His “seven thousand” are. In many Scriptural lessons He directs those who would flee in despair from troubles to turn around, to “go, return on thy way”, to find their brethren and strengthen them. Those who would hold firmly to the Truth in the midst of trials must combine their forces, strengthening and building up one another in God's service, sharing in good times and bad the fellowship of the saints.

27. Casting the First Stone (John 8:1-11)

Many critics do not regard these verses as authentic, but despite all the official doubts there are voices to be heard in their favor. Strong arguments have been advanced on both internal and external grounds, which are summarized elsewhere (John Carter, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 100,101; C.C. Walker, “The Woman Taken in Adultery”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 70, No. 831 — Sept. 1933 — pp. 405,406). The words of Jesus reported therein ring true and consistent both with the immediate context and the more general teachings of his ministry.

Jesus was teaching in the temple precincts one morning when a band of scribes and Pharisees thrust themselves through the crowd, dragging with them a terrified woman, whom they flung at the Master's feet. They reminded him of the law of Moses, requiring stoning for the offence of adultery, and also that this woman was apprehended in the very act. What does this new Rabbi have to say? Will he agree with Moses or, as rumored by those who have heard his teaching, will he throw over the revered traditions and laws of the fathers? It is Jesus, not the woman, who is on trial this day; how will he respond?

The first reaction of Jesus was to stoop down and write on the ground, apparently indifferent to their demands. But his crafty enemies were not to be ignored or put off; they pressed him again and again for an answer. But the answer they finally received came as a bombshell or, more precisely, as a searchlight from the “Light of the World” (v. 12) to reveal their innermost thoughts, their consciences stained indelibly with sin.

“He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone” (v. 7).

The burden of decision, with its consequent dangers, which these men had sought to thrust upon Jesus, was now placed squarely on their own shoulders. The law specified that the witnesses be the first to lift up the hand in punishment of a convicted sinner. Not only was this so but, by implication from the Law at least, such hands must be innocent of the same offence. It is reported that the first-century Jews, even those most devout for the Law, were notorious in their disregard for the sanctity of marriage, and divorces were granted for the most trivial of reasons. The Mosaic law in this regard had long fallen into disuse, and such punishments as they argued for here were no longer meted out. In fact, they would have been prohibited by the Romans at any rate.

Jesus put a sword with two edges in the hands of the woman’s accusers; should they lift it up against the adulteress they would also cut down themselves. That “first stone” is not in the world yet, if Christ’s condition be required. Only one man could have cast *that* stone, but he chose not to do so. The Light of the World had come, and his light shone in the darkness. Assuredly that penetrating light would reveal many works of darkness, no less the Pharisee’s subtlety and hatred than the woman’s immorality. But Jesus had come to offer life; the pronouncement of death for those who reject his offer was yet in the future.

He stood up and searched the faces of these rulers of Israel who had stooped so low. His eyes burned into them and they felt the disapproval of this man’s perfect holiness. Then he bowed again to write upon the ground. He had not accused them, but had left them to decide. They watched him as he wrote, conscious that at any moment he could stand up again to challenge any one of them, and they would have no defense. Silently, each man in turn confessed his own guilt by departing, “beginning at the eldest, even unto the last” (v. 9).

“That last phrase is an interesting one....The older we get the more experienced we become, and the more conscious we are of the scope and content of sin. Often when we read and hear of the sins of others we are conscious that our guilt is as great as theirs. For us, circumstance has not provided the occasion for the ‘very act’, or in the case of some has even provided a cloak for sin. So, with the scribes and Pharisees, it was the older and more experienced, the Gamaliels, who first turned away, and it was the young Zealots, the Sauls amongst them, who finally bowed their heads and left” (A. Ashton, “Neither Do I Condemn Thee”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 105, No. 1248 — June 1968 — p. 247).

Now, finally, Jesus stood again. The crowd, transfixed by the spectacle, remained awaiting an outcome. The poor bedraggled woman, her shame revealed to all, was still there where her accusers had cast her. But they were gone. Jesus now fixes his stare upon her. “Is there no man here to condemn thee?” They had all faded away as mists at the rising of the sun. “No man, Lord.” No witnesses remained to the crime, none willing to cast “the first stone”. “Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more” (v. 11).

The word for “condemn” here is *katakrino*, which signifies a formal passing of judgment. It was at this time the sole province of the Sanhedrin, supported and often restricted by the Roman rulers, to pass such judgment. Jesus had recently spoken of the Father committing all judgment to the Son (John 5:22), and it was so. The power was there, both moral and physical, to punish sinners; but the authority had not yet been assumed. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world (easy though it would have been!), but that the world *through him* might be saved (John 3:17). This was the great message of light and comfort and hope; it is the message we must share with one another and take to the world today. Christ does not *condone* sin — that lesson is plain from the incident too — but today, this age, is the “day of salvation”, not the “day of condemnation”. Those who persist in sin, with disregard to the holiness of Christ, will meet their fates soon enough without the intervention of their own imperfect brethren.

“This incident has proved invaluable in Christian history. It is a graphic exposition of the Master’s words on the mount, ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged’ (Matt. 7:1-5). However damning the evidence may be against our brother, if we pause and look into our own hearts, we shall go quietly away and leave him with his Lord. There are times when it becomes necessary to take action, but that action must not be taken because we have condemned our brother. It will be taken in the painful consciousness of our own unworthiness, and with a love which will plead intercession before the Throne of Grace. We shall wait with eagerness for the first signs of penitence so that we can joyfully restore the erring one to the fellowship of the saints” (M. Purkis, *A Life of Jesus*, p. 235).

“The greatest abhorrence of sin is not necessarily found in the one who is most severe on the sinner. Sinful men wanted to stone the sinful woman. It was the perfect man who saved her. In these days many of the brethren seem to think that if it is admitted that any members have sinned, the only logical course is to withdraw from them, while anyone who has reservations as to the correctness of such severity must be regarded as a partaker of the evil deeds and should be treated in like manner. There is no justification for such ideas in the Bible” (I. Collyer, *An Appeal to Christadelphians*, p. 5).

An appealing final thought arises in relation to this incident. The adversaries of Christ were insidious, and it is almost certain that secret inquiries had been made into his early life and that the peculiar circumstances of his begetting had been uncovered. This would naturally suggest to the minds of his foes the possibility of illegitimacy. This “secret”, as they saw it, might be exploited to discredit the dangerous teachings of the man. It is possible, then, to see this whole incident as contrived by the Lord’s enemies. The woman was caught in the very act, but where was the man? Perhaps he was even one of the conspirators, who enticed and compromised a betrothed woman (Deut. 22:23,24) only as a pretense for his friends to confront Jesus.

So if Jesus had said, “Yes, let her be stoned”, the retort would have immediately come back: “Then what should be done with *your mother?*” — for Mary had been a betrothed virgin at the time of his conception (Matt. 1:18,19).

Other such base insinuations, in this very chapter, may be seen in the same light: “Where is thy father?” (John 8:19), and “*WE* be not born of fornication” [as some are!] (v. 41).

Let us leave this account then with this final point for meditation. When we are hasty in seeking out “stones” to cast at our brethren, let us remember that many men have been unjustly accused, and that appearances are often deceiving! (Christ himself died as a “criminal”!) How childishly wrong we can be in our blusterings against the “sins” of others, when we cannot possibly know all the attendant facts. Better to leave such matters to the One who is without sin, the One who can and will judge perfectly when the time comes, and from whose eyes no sin whether open or secret can be hid.

28. The Sin of Gibeah (Judges 19 — 21)

A certain Levite and his concubine were traveling through the land of Benjamin, and as night approached they sought and received shelter in the home of an old man of Gibeah. But when the house was beset by certain “sons of Belial”, evoking unpleasant memories of the Sodomites (Gen. 19), they realized how unsafe they were. This Levite allowed his concubine to be abused by the Benjamites — a circumstance which speaks not much better of him than of those who threatened him.

Finding the woman dead in the morning, he took her body and divided it into twelve pieces and sent the pieces into all parts of Israel. Then all the children of Israel were gathered together “as one man” (20:1,8,11) out of revulsion at this hideous crime. By a comparison with 1 Samuel 11:7 we see that the people did not so act again in unison until the days of Samuel, probably 300 years later.

But their unity of action was unfortunately not preceded by consultation with God. The militia of the eleven tribes, minus Benjamin — 400,000 strong — made their plans without prayer. Though they finally asked of God who should go up first to the battle, yet their forces lost 22,000 men at the hands of the men of Benjamin, who defended Gibeah. This certainly implies that guilt in Israel was to be found on both sides, not only with Benjamin.

By various stratagems that need not be detailed now, the tribe of Benjamin was nearly annihilated. Once bloodshed started no one knew when to stop. In cutting off those who were guilty by their association, the rest of Israel used highly unsuitable methods and almost totally destroyed one of the twelve tribes. The punishment, because of haste and probably a measure of self-righteousness, was out of all proportion to the crime. In their zeal the men of Israel imposed by an oath a strict isolation upon those few Benjamites who remained, no matter what their degree of guilt or complicity.

The outcome was a terrible feeling of remorse, and some ironic words:

“O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?” (21:3).

The fault was their own, in going too far in their zeal for purity, and the decimation of Israel, on both sides, was their punishment. Finally the leaders of this bitter civil war realized that they had indeed overstepped the bounds of reason.

They now took some distinctly unusual steps, involving reprisals and kidnappings, to remedy, insofar as possible, the problem.

By these events the whole nation was disciplined and humbled and made to remember their essential unity as a nation, a unity that even extreme sins on the part of some should not be allowed to violate. Human nature has not changed from that day to this, and we often act still as though there is “no king in Israel”. We need as a brotherhood to remember that each of us shares in the same inheritance (21:17), and that we must with care and patience remove the defects of the body. Otherwise, the sword we lift up against our brethren may do irreparable harm to the whole house of Israel.

29. The Clean and the Unclean

Surely, in our quest for deeper understanding of the man Jesus and his message, something is to be learned from the people with whom he frequently came in contact. It is fair to say that these were not usually such as would have graced the finer synagogues of his day; nor, we might add, would their modern counterparts be immediately welcome in many of our ecclesial halls. This comes across rather impressively in catalogue form:

(1) Lepers: “And there came a leper to him, beseeching him and kneeling down to him....’If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean’ ” (Mark 1:40).

“The leper, in accord with the strict conditions of the law, should not have been so close. With torn garments and dishevelled hair he should have gone around crying ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ (Lev. 13:44,45), and he should have dwelt alone. The stern requirements of hygiene caused the Israelites to deny their camp in the wilderness to those in this condition (Num. 5:2). That the man came so close is a mark, not of callous disregard of the law, but of the supreme confidence which knew that he would do no injury to the Lord, while the Lord could, if he would, confer cleansing on him. Jesus, on his part, accepted the position without embarrassment, and acted with the same assurance. To touch a leper was to contract defilement; but for the Lord to do so was to bring cleansing without himself suffering any harm” (A.D. Norris, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 21).

(2) The Samaritan woman and her neighbors (John 4:1-42): Even the woman at the well recognized that the Jews customarily had no dealings with the Samaritans (v. 9). To the legalistically devout this was all too literally true; the gospel record finds an exact parallel in the well-reported sayings of the rabbis: “May I never set eyes on a Samaritan!” or “May I never be thrown into company with him!” It was said that to partake of their bread was like eating swine’s flesh (A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 1, p. 401). Most Israelites, in traveling between Judea and Galilee, went miles out of their way, circling through Perea, to avoid traversing the loathsome land of Samaria. How this gives weight by contrast to the statement of John, that Jesus “*must needs go through Samaria*” (v. 4). Not only did Jesus disregard the traditional proscriptions of the land of the Samaritans, but also it was *necessary* that he go there! And necessary that he wait at the well, and necessary that he ask drink of the woman (unthinkable to a Pharisee), and necessary that he remain in their city two days (v. 40) to bring to their thirsty lips the true water of life.

(3) The infirm man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9):

“High on the hill of Zion the immaculately robed priests observed the temple ritual, aloof and impersonal. In the shadows of its walls the halt, the blind and the withered waited for the movement of the water” (M. Purkis, *A Life of Jesus*, pp. 86,87).

Among them was a certain man with an infirmity of 38 years’ duration (v. 5). By the law such a man, if a descendant of Aaron, would be prohibited from all official duties (Lev. 21:17-23). Extreme body blemishes would exclude any Israelite from the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:1). And so the “pure and undefiled” of Israel went their way to the Temple services, oblivious of the poor, suffering scraps of humanity who clung superstitiously to the hope of healing at the pool. Where did the Master’s steps turn, upward to the beautiful ritualized service of Herod’s house, or downward to the miserable exiles of Bethesda? The true scene of his ministry was not among the subtle analysts of the law but in the midst of suffering, diseased, afflicted mankind, those who needed a redeemer.

(4) The harlot, “a woman in the city, which was a sinner” (Luke 7:37): So astounding was Jesus’ acceptance of this harlot’s approach and service, that his host Simon the Pharisee thought surely he could not be a prophet or else he would push her away and revile her for her sins (v. 39). He knew so little of the spirit of the Saviour! Do we know more?

(5) The lunatic (Mark 5:1-21; Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-40): Christ and his disciples came to the shore at Gergesa, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, in Decapolis. And there met them out of the *tombs* a man with an *unclean* spirit. Here

was a man expelled from all society by his condition (insanity), his appearance (nakedness), and his abode (the tombs). Yet Jesus approached him, spoke to him, even bearing with his fantasies, healed him, and gave him of his own garments (an unproven suggestion, but quite probable, and filled with wonderful typical significance)! So impressed, however, were those of the neighborhood that they begged him to leave (Mark 5:17); a man who consorted with such men as “Legion” could certainly be no friend of theirs.

(6) The woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34): Here was another condition which, like leprosy, rendered the sufferer unclean (Lev. 15:19-30). As Jesus went on his way, she pushed her timid way through the crowd: “If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.” This was the reverse of the legal restriction, which should have been: ‘If I touch his garment, *he* will be *unclean* also.’ How great was her faith! She knew what manner of man Jesus was: a man who could touch the unclean, and yet remain pure; a man whose law superseded that of Moses; a man to whom mental impurity was far worse than legal defilement.

(7) Gentiles: Of several examples, we note here the case of **the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:25,26; Matt. 15:21-28)**. Coming on the heels of the Lord’s discourse about the true source of defilement (Mark 7:1-23; Matt. 15:1-20), and in disregard for the traditions of the elders, this incident in which Jesus heals the daughter of the Gentile woman thus carries extra significance. Though the woman was not a Jew, her faith exceeded by far that of Jesus’ countrymen. As in the other cases we have noted, an external condition of separation was of no consequence to him who came to save the “world” and to call *sinners* to repentance.

(8) Publicans: Two of this hated class figure prominently in the gospels: Zaccheus, “chief among the publicans” (Luke 19:2), and one of the twelve, Matthew (Matt. 10:3; Luke 5:27). These servants of the Roman oppressors were held in such low esteem generally that the word “publican” had become practically synonymous with “sinner” (Matt. 9:11; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). Yet Jesus found friends among this class; perhaps some real-life publican was the model for the Lord’s account of contrasting prayer styles, for the admonition of those who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9-14).

On the opposite side, we have the rabbinical attitude toward the publicans: They were excluded from being judges and witnesses in legal affairs. They were seen as a criminal race, to which Leviticus 20:5 applied (about those who committed “whoredom with Molech”). It was said that there never was a family which numbered a tax-collector in which all did not become such. And they were seen as so evil that it was permissible for the righteous to lie to them to protect their property from taxation (Edersheim, *op. cit.*, p. 516).

(9) The dead (Mark 5:35-43; John 11:1-46; Luke 7:14): Here was *the ultimate defilement*, the dead body (Lev. 21:1; 22:4; Num. 5:2; 9:6,10); even from this Christ did not shrink. We know he could raise the dead by a word, as he did with Lazarus. But he did not hesitate to take the dead daughter of Jairus by the hand (Mark 5:41). His was the “personal touch” of sincere love. As always, it seems, the consequences of legal “uncleanness” were ignored as irrelevant beside the greater issues of his ministry. The Lord of *life* came near to *death*, partaking of mortality, bearing the burdens of those who grieved and the curse of the law, “tasting death” on behalf of all men.

By contrast with all of the above, we find the Lord, so kind and gentle on most occasions, becoming openly aggressive in censuring the *moral* defilement of those who were most scrupulous to avoid legal defilement. Surely, we are tempted to think, this very “religious” (even if misguided) class deserved more diplomatic treatment at his hands. But no figure of speech was too drastic for Christ to use: They were whited sepulchres, full of dead men’s bones (Matt. 23:27,28; Luke 11:44); cups clean on the outside, but filled with extortion and rapacity (Matt. 23:25; Luke 11:39). The reason? It may be said there are many, for the list of charges against the Pharisees is long and varied (Matt. 23:3-7,16-18,25-29,34), but certainly one reason is this: that it is dangerous to find satisfaction in any *physical* separation from “defilement”. “I thank thee, God, that I am not as other men” (Luke 18:11) is no basis on which to build one’s faith.

To go about preoccupied with the “sins” of others, ever mindful of how *their* shortcomings may reflect upon *us* by association, is to fight a “paper tiger”, while the true enemy goes free. “Let a man examine *himself*” (1 Cor. 11:28). Those things which are outside the man cannot defile him, but that which comes out of the man, from a self-righteous heart, defiles the man (Mark 7:18,20).

Brethren, how far are we really removed from the foolish prejudices and traditions of the Pharisees? Have we altogether reversed Christ’s standards, downplaying his emphasis on moral defilement — in a slow drift into the world’s thinking — and seeking to cover our inadequacies by an undue concern for legal “defilement”? We vicariously associate, through television and other media, with the worst the “world” has to offer by way of movie “stars”, sports “heroes”, and rock musicians; and, unconsciously perhaps, we absorb the spirit of this licentious and materialistic age. Then we dress in our

finest clothes and drive our new automobiles to places of worship on Sunday morning, where we meticulously draw our “skirts” about us and withhold the Bread and Wine from someone who is just slightly too “sinful” or not quite well enough “informed” for our standards (‘We thank thee, Lord, that we are not like these other men’), and somehow we feel that in this we are doing God service.

We must be careful that the means by which all believers are commanded to remember the Lord’s death until he returns does not become a ritual, with supposed efficacy in the object itself, by which we establish our “purity” in a negative sense. “Negative holiness” can save no man. Neither can the proximity of a “sinner”, even one so close as to partake of the same cup, endanger our “fellowship” with one who was ever and always the friend of “sinners”, who embraced lepers and lunatics, harlots and dead bodies — yet in the best sense was still “holy, harmless, and undefiled” (Heb. 7:26).

30. The Fellowship of His Suffering (Isaiah 53)

Again, we come in our survey to a passage which critics of our viewpoint would argue has “nothing to do with fellowship”. And in one sense they would be correct. The word itself does not appear at all in the chapter. But the best students of the Bible must agree that, in the close study of any divine subject, the more broadly based our conclusions are, the better. The All-wise Father does not teach His children by simple assertion only; if He did, then our Bible would need be no more lengthy than our Statement of Faith. But He teaches us also by type, parable, history, prophecy, and example. Foremost among the examples given for our instruction is His only-begotten Son. The example of Christ’s sacrificial life, culminating in a cruel, lingering death, speaks volumes to the reflective soul concerning “fellowship”. We might even say that “fellowship” is the *main theme* of Isaiah 53, for it tells us of Christ’s *sharing*, his *partaking* of our infirmities.

Isaiah 53 is a mountain peak of God’s Word. I will not attempt an exhaustive, or even a brief exposition of the chapter as a whole. This has been done very ably by others, and their efforts will be well-known to most. Let us simply consider the chapter as it relates to our fellowship experiences and responsibilities, as a moral issue and not a “theological” one (in the common sense of the word).

No man of faith can *stand* before the cross. It is perpetually holy ground — this mysterious place of meeting between God and man. The perceptive disciple approaches the mercy seat on his knees; he finds there no place to display his own strength or wisdom or cleverness. All the qualities that develop pride in natural man are driven from him further and further with each blow of the hammer upon the Roman spikes. As his awareness deepens, he must finally acknowledge that the cross of Christ has become, not a set of logical premises to be thrown back and forth in legalistic debate, but rather a moral mandate. As the rising of the sun drives away the darkness and creates each day a new world, God’s love for man as demonstrated in Christ’s death and resurrection forever changes the spiritual landscape for the believer. Every issue of his life must now be viewed in the peculiar divine glow emanating from Golgotha.

And thus our fellowship, with the Father and the Son and with one another, is seen against the background of Christ’s sacrifice. Here is the practical expression of his fellowship with us, his brethren. This should be our example of action toward one another.

To those of us who have been accustomed to read Isaiah 53 as related only to the last day or so of our Savior’s mortal life, the quotation in Matthew 8:16,17 comes as quite a surprise:

“When the evening was come, they brought unto him many demoniacs.... and he healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.’ ”

Surely these verses are telling us that Christ’s sympathy for poor suffering humanity was an intensely personal feeling. We can imagine no stronger words to convey the closeness, the unity, the fellowship of suffering. Here is no theoretical transfer of guilt or sin-effect; there is no ritual, no ceremony about it — it is real, as real as it can be! This man was one of us. He stood before the tomb of a friend and shed real tears. Our weaknesses were his... are his still, this high priest who was touched so deeply with the sensation of our infirmities, and who carried it with him into the most holy place. For our griefs are his, our sorrows also. For us he was willing to die; for us, finally and conclusively, he did die. And not just for “us” as a whole or a concept or an abstraction, but... this is the real wonder.... he died for each *one* of us! Had there been only one sinner, Christ would have still been willing to die. When each of us stands before the judgment seat, he will be looking into the eyes of a man who gave his life, personally and individually, for him.

Yes, it truly is a marvel: The Savior of mankind suffered for sinners. For the man who blasphemed God’s Holy Name, Christ spent sleepless nights in prayer. For the man who coveted, and even took, his neighbor’s wife, Christ denied

himself all fleshly indulgences. For the man who in hot anger or cold hatred slew his brother, Christ bore the Roman scourge that tore his flesh and exposed his bones and nerves. And for us, “righteous” as we might be in the ordinary “middle-of-the-road” sense, but sinners at heart if we would but admit it, consumed with petty jealousies and grumbings, unthankful, lazy, and often indifferent — yes, for people like us — Christ, the holiest of all men, groaned and bled and died.

What does it really mean, to bear the griefs and sorrows of another? As exemplified in Christ, it was more, much more, than a mechanical “burden-bearing”. It was a “living sacrifice”, a way of life that denied the lusts of the flesh within himself, while at the same time loving and striving continuously for the well-being of his brethren who could not, or did not, so deny themselves. And when they failed, and failed miserably, he bore with their failures and never gave way to “righteous”, condemning anger — but only expressed sorrow and gentle rebuke. Was there ever such a man? “For even Christ pleased not himself” (Rom. 15:3).

“The Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of *us* all.” “He was wounded for *our* transgressions.” Here again we Christadelphians so quickly lapse into the “technical” aspects (the word here almost seems sacrilegious) of Christ’s sacrifice. We carefully point out that Christ did not bear the *guilt* of our sins, and that he did not die in our stead. And there is nothing wrong with saying such things, in their proper place. But, is it not possible that we are missing the main point? Call it what you will, hedge it about with exceptions and careful definitions, when all is said and done, HE DID DIE — and that is the important issue!

Let us be careful here; let us examine ourselves. In our zeal for “truth”, are we so caught up in the theory that the fact is almost ignored? Do we suppose that when we have explained, in man’s imperfect language, why Christ died, on a *legal* basis — that our conception of the cross is complete? No, brethren. This man died because he loved to the uttermost his brethren. Here is the lesson. Christ’s way of life, the “fellowship” he practiced in regular interaction with his brethren, is the challenge to us. Do we perceive that love as an impossible theory — or as a reality, to be reproduced and practiced by us, here and now? Our Savior calls us, he commands us, he entreats us, insofar as we can, to do as he did. He sets before us an ecclesial life of difficulties, of sorrows, of problems — and he tells us: ‘Bear the infirmities, even the iniquities of your brethren. I died for them; you must live for them. I did not please myself; neither should you. They are *all* worth saving, they are *all* worth loving, they are *all* worth your sacrifices and prayers — or else *none* of you are worth it! If you really believe in my love, then you must believe that your ecclesial problems can be solved — and that love is the key to their solution.’

We break bread and drink wine as a memorial of our fellowship with God through Christ. We do not *earn* this right; it is a profound privilege and a gift, earned by the sufferings of Christ. It is given *freely* to sinners, if they will only believe. A fine record of outstanding accomplishment, accompanied by perfect purity of doctrine (remember our “brother” the Pharisee who prayed in the temple!), will not *earn* us eternal life. The spirit that compasses sea and land to bring division between brethren of Christ for the smallest hint of a cause will not *earn* eternal life, no matter how zealously exercised that spirit is!

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic. 6:8).

THE OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

Having considered in detail the passages most relevant to Biblical fellowship, we now examine those that might be placed under the heading of “Biblical *dis*-fellowship”. Perhaps we can determine, from a review of both sets, how far we may reasonably go, and where we may reasonably stop, in our demands upon our fellow-believers. These passages are grouped under the heading *OBJECTIONS* because those who would most object to the general drift of this study to this point would no doubt quote such verses in counter-argument. I feel that these “*dis*-fellowship” passages have been seriously misused by many Christadelphians. They have been “wrested”, in some cases, out of their quite restricted contexts and made to do duty that the inspired writers never intended. The extent of these misinterpretations will be apparent as we continue.

31. Old Testament “General Teachings”

It is worthy of note that the idea of disfellowship, or excommunication, of many ecclesias worldwide for the sins or supposed sins of those in one corner of the world is often confidently advanced under the umbrella of “the overall teaching of the Old Testament”. Such passages as Deuteronomy 17:2-7 (the idolator’s punishment); 18:9-12 (the elimination of false religions); 20:16 (Canaanite abominations); and Joshua 7 (Achan and the Babylonish garment) are cited to support the like treatment of those who espouse wrong ideas today in spiritual Israel.

The difficulties in such a generalization are manifold. In the first place, New Testament fellowship should be established and controlled on the basis of New Testament passages. It would be a very easy matter to produce a number of plainly absurd conclusions by applying the same methods to other Old Testament passages. For examples, should arranging boards recommend the stoning of “Sabbath-breakers”? What should believers do today, preach the love of Christ and the coming kingdom of God to their more-or-less “heathen” neighbors, or launch military campaigns against them?

Secondly, the great principles of God are fundamental and eternal — we are speaking of the majestic themes of Scripture, such as the covenants of promise, light and darkness, love and hate, and the holiness of God — but the personal applications vary enormously from time to time. Our twentieth-century ecclesial leaders do not have the inspired wisdom that the apostles and many of their co-workers had in the first century. It must not be forgotten that the “general teaching” of the Old Testament was the application of sound principles to changing circumstances by men inspired by God. These men, like Moses, were directly and explicitly commanded, when God judged the time as ripe, to punish evildoers. A close parallel between those days and ours is clearly impossible.

Even such Old Testament “retributive” passages as listed above do not go so far as to require the “elimination” of those otherwise righteous worshipers of God whose only “sin” was living side by side with such as Baal-worshippers. Yet the principle of worldwide fellowship responsibility, to be proven, would necessitate some such Mosaic precedent as the annihilation of entire villages, the worshipers of the Lord along with those of Baal, simply because they did not act against the error in their midst. And, even if this sort of reasoning be allowed thus far, which is without Scriptural precedent, should the next village over the hill be similarly destroyed for failure adequately to “police” its neighbor town?

Perhaps the best argument against such an exaggerated view of fellowship responsibility is one that has already been mentioned elsewhere; yet it is so important that a second reference would not be out of place. Where the prophets of Israel witnessed against the spiritual abuses among their contemporaries they did so while still continuing full fellowship with those whom they denounced. More than this, the examples of Moses (Exod. 32:30-33), Daniel (9:5-14), Nehemiah (1:6,7), Jeremiah (3:25; 9:1), and Ezra (9:6,7,13) show these men intimately associated with the people whom they reprimanded, even so far as confessing the sins of the nation as though they were their own. Here is the spirit of true fellowship, or sharing, by which those most exercised against error bear the burdens of their brethren, and strive with them as partners — not outsiders — to defeat the enervating effects of sin. Such a policy stands, with God’s blessing, a chance of success. But the opposing policy condemns from the beginning innocent and guilty alike, and invariably fails in the object it purportedly seeks — that is, the elimination of error; for who ever gives serious attention to those who “walk out”? By all standards of law, both human and divine, such “deserters” forfeit any voice in the affairs of the enterprise. Who welcomes, or even listens to, the advice of those on the outside looking in? Imagine a brother who, finding his neighbor’s ox in the ditch (Deut. 22:4), stands carefully aside but generously gives constant directions to the sorely-beset owner as to how to extricate his animal. And James similarly tells of the rather impractical (to say the least!) character who says to the cold and hungry, “Be ye warmed and filled” (2:16), but cannot bring himself to become “involved” enough to really help.

A final point completely overturns any appeal for severity to the general Old Testament teachings. It is this: the Lord was in *unbroken* “fellowship” with the nation of Israel from the time He brought them out of Egypt until Ezekiel’s day. This is proven by the presence of the “Shekinah” glory, leading the people by cloud and fire through the wilderness, and afterward enthroned in tabernacle and temple. The nation was from time to time filled with the grossest abominations, with widespread indifference to the prophets’ messages, and with every other imaginable sin. God’s messengers were incessant in their demands for reform; but no matter how evil the nation, a righteous remnant always remained and consequently the nation was preserved. Its “fellowship” with God was only withdrawn when His glory was seen departing by stages from the Temple on the eve of Jerusalem’s captivity (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4,18,19; 11:23). Until then, no matter how imperfect their service, Israel remained in communion with God. Thus, if anything may be learned of the general principles of fellowship from the Old Testament, it is that it was never lightly withdrawn from those who bore the name of God — as has been done in His Name, and often for the flimsiest of reasons, by more than a few modern believers.

32. “Bidding God Speed” (2 John)

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (vv. 10,11).

Without attempting a complete exposition of this letter, it should be noted that John was addressing an unnamed sister and mother in the Truth, one in whose home the ecclesia of that district met. In her kindness the “elect lady” (v. 1) had offered her hospitality to certain traveling preachers who could scarcely, if at all, be called Christian.

What was the doctrine so heinous as to merit the title for its purveyors of “antichrist” (v. 7)? It was the erroneous contention that Jesus did not “come in the flesh”, in other words, that he was in essence God and only *seemed* to suffer the frailties of humanity and the climactic death on the cross. The apostle rightly saw this as a significant perversion of the gospel, which effectively nullified all else of truth to be found in the itinerant speakers’ message. He therefore counseled the sister not to receive such men into her house nor, by implication, to receive them at the Breaking of Bread held there. They were to be shunned completely.

The question is this: Was such a prohibition intended to apply, as a general rule, to any and every irregularity of belief or practice, whenever and wherever manifested? The answer is, emphatically, “No”. The particular error in 2 John is said to be that of “*anti-Christ*”, etymologically signifying that which *replaces* or stands as a contrast to the true Christ. The name seems to be reserved for those errors which deny the nature and character of Christ (1 John 2:18,22; 4:1-3), thereby rendering unintelligible his redemptive work.

A passage from Robert Roberts is often quoted to justify the disfellowship of everyone that might, mistakenly or otherwise, bread bread with some individual who believes any error. Brother Roberts says, among other things:

“As to those who bring not this doctrine, John’s comment is — ‘Receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed!’ This commandment we can no more evade than any other commandment delivered unto us.”

The citation is certainly forceful enough as it stands to support most any wide-scale excommunication of individuals and ecclesias alike. However, the effect is drastically mitigated when a portion of the immediately preceding paragraph is also quoted:

“The doctrine of Christ is that he is God made and manifested in mortal flesh of Abraham’s race for the deliverance thereof, on his own principles, from ‘that having the power of death’ ” (*Seasons of Comfort*, p. 98).

It was to such as “bring not *this* doctrine” (according to both John Thomas and Robert Roberts), *and to such only*, that the extremely harsh directive of the apostle should apply.

The sweeping use to which our brother’s words are often put is specifically denied by him in another passage. There he speaks of “fellowship” on far more practical, reasonable, and (we might say) spiritual grounds than some of his “followers” would care to admit:

“Fellowship is friendly association for the promotion of a common object — *with more or less of the imperfection belonging to all mortal life*. To say that every man in that fellowship is responsible for every infirmity of judgment that may exist in the association is *an extreme* to which no man of sound judgment can lend himself. There will be flawless fellowship in the perfect state. Perhaps it is the admiration of this in prospect that leads some to insist upon it now. But it is none the less a *mistake*. This is a mixed and preparatory state in which much has to be put up with when the true principles are professed” (“True Principles and Uncertain Details”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 35, No. 407 — May 1898 — p. 187).

In reviewing verse 10, other points of interest emerge:

“If there come any unto you...” —

These verses clearly refer to some serious error introduced into one’s local ecclesia. They give no sanction to the searching out of alleged error in other ecclesias, much less those which are great distances away, on the basis of some rumor.

“And bring not this doctrine” —

These deceivers were active, positive false *teachers*, engaged in a campaign, not just “holders” of false doctrine or those who might be termed “weaker brethren” or “honest doubters”, who should be sought after and reclaimed.

“Neither bid him God speed” —

“God speed” was an unfortunate choice by the translators of the AV, a choice which has colored much of subsequent Christadelphian analysis of this passage. Brother Roberts equates “God speed” with “intimacy, toleration, and cooperation” (*The Law of Moses*, p. 285); this may be implicit in the text, but it is certainly not the primary meaning. The

Greek word is **chairo** — which merely means “greeting” or “farewell”; it is so used many times in the New Testament (Matt. 26:49; 27:29; Luke 1:28; John 19:3; Acts 15:23; 2 Cor. 13:11; James 1:1). It may also mean “to rejoice” (Matt. 2:10; John 3:29; 16:22; Rom. 12:12; 2 Cor. 6:10; Rev. 19:7).

This presents us with a couple of alternative views of the passage:

(1) These false teachers’ doctrine was so extremely dangerous that they could not even be greeted courteously, nor be given the most elementary considerations due even to out-and-out worldlings, much more to “erring brethren”. Such a view, in conformity with our understanding of this special doctrine, thus removes this passage from serious consideration as a guideline to ecclesial duties toward most other, milder forms of error. Would any “minority fellowship” brethren seriously want to adopt such an attitude toward all other Christadelphians? The otherwise unanimous view of the apostolic passages regarding errorists is that they are to be gently entreated, and diplomatically led away from their follies. So we have here in 2 John a unique case, and consequently one which gives no real precedent for lesser issues.

(2) The second possibility, much less likely, is this: If the word **chairo** here signifies “to rejoice”, then that which designates brethren “partakers of the evil deeds” of gross errorists is their *rejoicing* in that evil — that is, wholeheartedly approving of and positively participating in the propagation of error. This is not to suggest that something less, say a passive toleration, is proper — it may be wrong too, depending on circumstances — but only that it is not the “partaking” or “fellowshipping” of the error which some interpreters would have it to be.

Therefore, no matter which of the two interpretations of “God speed” be chosen, the verse is not that clear-cut directive to the “block disfellowship” of all that break bread with one false teacher. Even if the elders of an ecclesia should decide to tolerate the membership of one holding false doctrine, it cannot be said that members of that ecclesia who continue to use every opportunity to expose and denounce his errors are “bidding him God speed” or “partaking of his evil deeds”. To say that they are is a travesty of language. The situation has been known a hundred times over that something done or said by a brother has been openly disapproved of by the rest of his ecclesia without excommunication being applied. At times the simpler expedient of removing such a brother from all speaking and teaching duties has allowed him the scope to recover his spiritual balance and forsake his error.

Brother Roberts’ understanding of “God speed” certainly conforms to this. He says:

“If men lend themselves to the evil projects of others and wish them well in them, no doubt they are as responsible for those projects as if they actually promoted them with their own personal labours. This is the principle to which John gives expression when he says, ‘He that biddeth him (the holder of false doctrine) God speed is partaker of his evil deeds’ “ (“True Principles and Uncertain Details”, pp. 187,188).

The problem in a single-minded reliance on this passage to justify wholesale separation is evident when the effects are fully considered. It is self-evident that an interpretation of a passage that “proves” too much actually proves nothing at all — for then there is surely something wrong with that interpretation. This is so with an unbalanced view of 2 John 10,11: (1) If merely refusing to punish error is “bidding God speed” to it, then was Christ a “partaker of the evil deeds” of the adulteress when he said, “Neither do I condemn thee”? (2) Should brethren hold themselves to be “partakers” and thus *personally guilty* of every aberration or “sin” of every brother or sister in their “fellowship”? This is perceived as sheer folly when examples are considered. Suppose, for example, one brother in your worldwide fellowship — *only one* — smokes; suppose another, but only one, occasionally drinks to excess. Now you yourself never touch tobacco or liquor of any sort. Are you nevertheless a “partaker” of these things, and many more, because you endure these brethren in your “fellowship”? In short, is a brother really the sum of all the worst parts of all his weakest brethren? Such ill-founded logic must be our conclusion if we apply 2 John 10,11 to any and every ecclesia situation.

Two short quotations from John Thomas would seem to go well here:

(1) Of the correspondent who accused him of being a “slave owner”, he wrote:

“His argument is that in fellowshipping slave owners, and those who fellowship them, the parties so fellowshipping them are partakers with them of their evil deeds; and therefore as much slave owners and slave holders as if they actually held and drove them. The argument is specious but *not sound*” (*The Herald*, 1851, p. 204).

(2) And again:

“The salvation of individuals is not predicated on the purity of their neighbour’s faith, though these may be members of the same ecclesiastical organization” (*Ibid.*, p. 120).

In conclusion: 2 John 10,11 appears to be the *only* passage in the Bible which puts “tolerators” on the same ground of condemnation as the “false teachers” themselves. We have shown that, for the purposes of condemning those who “bid them God speed”, this passage proves either too little (for the context is quite specialized) or too much (thus making us all “partakers” of every “evil” to be found in our midst). The wisest course would appear to be that we leave 2 John alone as “pure fellowship” justification, and that we turn our attentions to other passages which may give more solid footing, and practical limitations as well, for Biblical “disfellowship”.

33. “An Heretick” (Titus 3:10)

We come next to Paul’s warning to Titus, the elder of the ecclesia (or ecclesias) on the island of Crete:

“Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject (*paraiteomia*); knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Tit. 3:9-11).

The word *paraiteomia* has also been translated “avoid” (2 Tim. 2:23) and “refuse” (1 Tim. 4:7; 5:11); it points to the clear duty of rejecting or excommunicating a “heretic”. However, the provision of a first and second admonition must not be forgotten, and this points the way to a comparison with the similar order of admonition in Matthew 18:15-17 (see Chapter 9). The disfellowship, if such is finally deemed necessary, must be done in the spirit of meekness, and at every step the brethren so acting must endeavor in love to reclaim the offender. Such matters *must* be handled locally, and not be allowed to unsettle ecclesias elsewhere.

“There is need for a faithful rather than a harsh observance of this apostolic counsel today. The most serious consideration should be given to the question of whether a brother’s nonconformity is of such a nature as to justify the grave decision of exclusion. Each elder should ask himself the question, in all cases, not ‘Do we traditionally disfellowship for this divergence?’ but ‘Can I, as a responsible elder and shepherd, give full satisfaction to my Lord at his judgment seat, that I do well to exclude this brother?’” (J.B. Norris, *The First Century Ecclesia*, p. 55).

Furthermore, it must be noted that those brethren or ecclesias that fail to excommunicate “heretics” are *not* to be equated with the “heretics” themselves. (Such a notion is based solely, but erroneously, on 2 John 10,11.) They may be disobedient to the apostolic injunction, but this shortcoming does not of itself constitute them guilty of the same or as serious offence as their erring brother. These words of Paul do not sanction the judging and disfellowshipping of large numbers at a distance — for how then could the “admonitions” be properly administered? In fact, no Bible passage sanctions division from a nominally sound ecclesia because of its supposed failure fully to discipline an offender.

The seventeenth-century translators have made a rather unfortunate choice of words here. “Heretick” is a quite interesting and complex word, but subject to misinterpretation. Transliterated from the Greek, it is *haireisis*, or “heresy”. The word denotes a “choice”, or that which is chosen; hence, an opinion. Secondly, it means a “sect” or division — a party formed, either as a subgroup of a main body, or in extreme cases entirely independent (W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, Vol. 2, p. 217, and Vol. 3, p. 335). It is not even implied that the distinctive character of the “sect” is a doctrine at all (*Speaker’s Commentary, New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 817). The Sadducees and the Pharisees were called “sects” or “heresies” (Acts 5:17; 26:5), as were the “Christians” before their break from Judaism was complete (Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22). The Greek word has no inherent suggestion of an error, only of party spirit tending toward division. It was only in post-apostolic times that “heresy” acquired the invariable meaning of doctrinal divergence; the term was so applied to all deviations from the Roman Catholic apostasy during the fourth century and beyond (*Imperial Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, p. 86; *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 3, p. 1377).

A “heretick”, therefore, would signify an “opinionated person” (W.R. Mitchell, “The Epistle of Titus”, *The Dawn Ecclesial Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 12 — Dec. 1957 — p. 274), a separatist, a causer of schism or division, *for whatever reason*. Paul says that a heretic is “self-condemned” (Tit. 3:11), apparently because of the position of separation in which he has placed himself. Thus the ecclesia’s rejection of him is more or less an official acknowledgement of the “status quo”.

The main accompanying idea in the other passages where *haireisis* occurs is of some sort of division:

- (1) In 1 Corinthians 11:18,19 it is used synonymously with “schisms”, which, however, had not yet resulted in full-scale ecclesial division, but only in factions.
- (2) It is listed with strife, seditions, and envyings as one of “the *works* of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21); the list, however, includes no false doctrines.
- (3) In 2 Peter 2:1,2 “heresy” is the *division* which certain men cause unjustly, not the false doctrines they teach!

All this agrees well with the context of Paul’s letter to Titus. Therein he more than once characterizes the Cretans in general as liars, lazy gluttons, and envious (1:12; 3:3), men naturally given to controversies, dissensions, and quarrels (3:9) — in short, men who are always combative, never satisfied, potential sectarians, troublemakers, or “heretics”. It is an extraordinary irony that those brethren who feel they are most scrupulous at resisting “heretics” (i.e. teachers of false doctrines?) through their policy of absolute separation are *themselves* guilty of b

eing “heretics” (schismatics) in the Biblical sense.

34. “Walking Disorderly” (2 Thessalonians 3)

“Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us... And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thes. 3:6,14).

The argument for a “pure fellowship” achieved through broad excommunication goes as follows: “It is part of Paul’s word by this letter that we ‘withdraw’ from any brother who ‘walks disorderly’. If this withdrawal is not enforced, then it is necessary to ‘have no company’ not only with the original sinner, but also with all who disregard Paul’s instruction.”

This rather casually constructed logic runs afoul of several considerations:

- (1) Verse 6 describes not false teachers, but those whose way of life is contrary to the apostolic norm. The “disorderly” meant the idlers, or loafers, who rapidly turned into “busybodies” (vv. 7,10,11). The word translated “disorderly” here is also translated “unruly” in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. It is actually a military term for those “out of step” when marching, and thus “insubordinate” (A. Hall, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, p. 147). This lack of discipline in the case of the Thessalonian ecclesia was manifested in a refusal to work (vv. 8,10,12), perhaps because of a misguided belief that Christ’s imminent return rendered labor unnecessary.
- (2) It must not be supposed, because Christadelphians conventionally use the milder “withdraw” instead of the more appropriate “disfellowship” or “excommunicate”, that the severing of fellowship ties is the meaning of “withdraw” wherever it occurs. As a matter of fact, the word *stello* (withdraw) signifies “to avoid”, the idea being that the ways of the unruly are to be shunned. The brethren themselves, however, are exhorted by Paul to work (v. 12); they have *not* been cast out of the meeting! He speaks to them directly in terms that would seem highly inappropriate to evildoers no longer worthy of fellowship at all. Verse 15 uses the word “admonish”, a quite mild term. The parallel passage (1 Thes. 5:14) says that such disorderly brethren are to be “warned”, again a degree of discipline much less severe than excommunication.
- (3) Verse 14: “Have no company with” merely means: ‘Do not join such brethren in their idle ways. By your aloofness you can express dissatisfaction. And perhaps the busybodies will become ashamed (v. 15) and begin to reform themselves.’

We see, therefore, that 2 Thessalonians 3 does deal with matters of ecclesial order, but only as pertaining to local matters of personal conduct. The terms of separation do not necessarily imply disfellowship. Even if disfellowship were the final outcome of an unrepentant attitude, the basis of that disfellowship would be improper conduct and not false doctrine. Finally, there is no suggestion that ecclesias failing to act as severely as Paul commands should themselves be disfellowshipped en masse by all other ecclesias. Yet all use of this passage to justify “block disfellowship” or “guilt by association” assumes that it clearly says this.

35. “Walking Together” (Amos 3:3)

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”

This is surely one of the most curious passages quoted by the advocates of “pure fellowship at any price”, inasmuch as their application of it has so very little regard for the context. The verse is used to suggest the notion that only when there is perfect agreement among brethren can they “walk together” in the bonds of fellowship. In the first place such a blanket assertion is not true, and in the second place such a usage of the verse is entirely beside the point.

It is certainly wrong to state as a matter of principle that two men cannot cooperate unless they are perfectly agreed in every particular. In actual practice, nothing is further from the truth. Two men or a group *can* work together quite well on a common project by agreeing beforehand to submerge their differences in matters of secondary importance. If in their minds there is the same major goal, then minor considerations are modestly set aside so that their full energies may be directed toward its achievement. Such a policy is wise, and Scriptural! Peter's "Be ye subject one to another" (1 Pet. 5:5) surely expresses such a spirit of "compromise" in the best sense, as does Paul's exhortation to the strife-prone Corinthians:

"There should be no schism in the body... the members should have the same care one for another" (1 Cor. 12:25).

What then is the point of Amos 3:3? Perhaps the RSV rendering here would be helpful:

"Do two walk together, unless they have made an appointment?"

Or, as the Hebrew: 'unless they have *met together*?' This sounds very much like the thoughts expressed above: two men can and do walk together *IF* they have agreed beforehand to walk together; it is as simple as that.

However, a consideration of the prophet's message in the broader sense indicates that the two who must agree in order to walk together are God and man. God knew Israel in the sense that to Israel He had committed His laws (v. 2; Psa. 147:19,20). This knowledge placed upon Israel the burden of responsibility to obey God, to agree to walk with Him; else Israel would be punished above all the nations for her transgressions. But, responsibilities aside, there are also great privileges in such a close association with the Almighty:

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

Man must walk in communion and harmony of heart and purpose with God. In doing so his blessings will be many, but if he deserts such a partnership then he may expect fiery judgment. God is saying, 'Can you think to ignore My advice and still claim to be My friend?'

The very first thing God asks us to agree with Him about is that we are sinners, not that we are as perfect as He is. An awareness of our weaknesses before God should make us considerably more sympathetic toward the weaknesses of our brethren. The goal of all is that we learn day by day to walk more and more in conformity with God's will. In the awesome shadow cast by our Father, we are all no better than toddlers, and our petty quarrels with His other babes are just so much futility, and are due to our limited horizons. The Lord of all creation has condescended to grasp each of us by the hand; like a natural father, He has shortened His pace so that we may be helped and guided in our first faltering steps upward toward manhood. Let us set our attentions upon His standard and strive to conform to it; let us *walk with God* (Gen. 5:22; 6:9; 17:1), and not be so concerned to scrutinize the faltering steps of our brothers.

One final thought: Today divorce has become a widespread practice in the world around us, so much so that many young people enter marriages fully intending to terminate them at the first sign of trouble, on such flimsy grounds as "incompatibility". It is as if they are saying, 'We can no longer walk together, because we do not agree on such-and-such.' There are few in the brotherhood who would not deplore such a childish disregard for the marriage bond. And yet how often do brethren put forward this same excuse for "divorcing" themselves from a bond just as sacred — the tie that binds (or should bind) all Christ's brethren together! They thus put asunder in the spiritual realm what they would never think of dissolving on the domestic level; and this means a debris of broken homes and lingering recriminations. And all because they will not apply the same restraint and reasonableness and patience and understanding in the ecclesial family that every husband and wife knows is essential in the natural family.

36. "First Pure, Then Peaceable" (James 3)

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable..."

One of the most extraordinary perversions in the whole of Christadelphian exposition is the not uncommon use of James 3:17 to justify agitation and strife in the pursuit of "purity". It is a terribly wrong use of the Bible to toss about convenient phrases as slogans, with absolutely no regard for their context.

"In times of ecclesial strife, it is often assumed, *quite unfairly*, that to advocate a policy of patient negotiation and attempt to avert division by every proper means, is to display lack of a sense of Scriptural priorities and unhealthy tolerance of error. James is often (wrongly) called in aid of a vigorous campaigning for purity of doctrine as an essential preliminary to the restoration of harmony and peace. For does he not say 'the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable' (3:17) and is unity not therefore dependent upon oneness of mind in things spiritual?" (A.H. Nicholls, "First Pure, Then Peaceable", *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 109, No. 1295 — May 1972 — p. 193; this article is virtually repeated in Vol. 113, No. 1343 — May 1976 — pp. 161,162).

And it is so tempting to read this phrase as a time sequence: Take care of the purity first, and then the peace will naturally follow. Contend earnestly for the faith, with tooth and nail if need be, and then take the fragments that remain when the strife has run its course, and establish an "honorable" peace only among those who are absolutely of one mind — because they agree absolutely with you! Can the policy so much like the repressive tactics of a Hitler or a Stalin, tactics that allow no disagreement and ensure peace by steamrolling the opposition — can such a philosophy truly commend itself to Christ's brethren? Is "first" really a note about time, as though one could be "pure" this week but not necessarily "peaceable" till the next, when the other fellow has been disposed of?

The entire passage in James (3:13-18), dealing with true wisdom, is an extended contrast between two types of "wisdom", one which has its origins from "beneath" and the other from "above". Envy and strife and debate, motivated by *impure* thoughts, are from beneath; they are natural rather than spiritual. Against such manifestations of the "wisdom" of man the apostle Paul also spoke:

"For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would....lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults..." (2 Cor. 12:20).

And he warned the Galatian brethren:

"If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (5:15).

By contrast, the positive theme of James' words here is a peace born of love and sincerity (purity of motives). Heavenly wisdom is free to manifest itself in works of meekness (v. 13); it need not resort to bombast and agitation. True righteousness is motivated by Scriptural peace — inward calm and outward gentleness (v. 18).

The words of the apostles imply far from idyllic conditions in the early ecclesias. Their warnings are just as valid, and perhaps more so, to us today as we survey a divided body and ask ourselves why.

"Even in those early days, there were men who had a measureless self-conceit, a bitter jealousy of those whom their brethren regarded with affection and trust, an arrogant confidence in their own opinion and their own judgment; men in whom there was very little of the spirit of Christ, but who were quite certain that they, and they alone, had the mind of Christ; men who were resolved, whatever might come of it, to force upon the ecclesias their own beliefs either with regard to doctrine or practice; who made parties in the ecclesia to carry out their purposes, held secret meetings, flattered those who stood by them as being faithful to conscience and to Christ, and disparaged the fidelity of all those who differed from them" (N. Smart, *The Epistle of James*, p. 117).

The tragic misuse of James 3:17 to justify every manner of agitation and division stems also from a misguided apprehension of the word "pure". As James uses it here, the word applies only to moral deportment, not to the body of first principles commonly but not altogether correctly called "doctrine". Indeed, the word *hagnos* and its related words have reference *always* to moral purity; in other passages these words are appropriately translated "chaste" (2 Cor. 11:2; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:2) and "sincerely" (Phil. 1:16). The verb form appears as "purify" in such passages as James 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22; and 1 John 3:3, with the same connotation. By using *hagnos* James does not convey so much the idea of cleansing or catharsis, but more nearly that of holiness or sanctification, freedom from any kind of defilement of mind or conscience, or from any inward stain or blemish (L.G. Sargent, *The Teaching of the Master*, p. 71).

The Bible emphasis, therefore, is not upon "pure doctrine" (the phrase occurs nowhere in the AV or RV), but invariably upon "sound doctrine", the healthful teaching which informs the spiritual mind and keeps the ecclesial body pure and wholesome. It refers equally to method as to content. The very test of a teaching's soundness is whether or not it produces strife (Nicholls, *op. cit.*, p. 194). Wisdom is to be "pure", whilst doctrine is to be "sound", an enormous distinction.

It might also be noted that neither is "fellowship" ever Scripturally characterized as being "pure". Purity in the absolute sense belongs to God alone, and in any other relation is only relative. *Purity* of conduct is something for which to strive,

since Christ commands, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:45). But it cannot be said that we should strive for the “purity” of belief of our brethren by the questionable means of agitation. And, even if we were so instructed, the outcome of such an inquisitional search for “purity” would certainly not be the desired “peace”.

Inasmuch as words are just about as well defined by citing their antonyms as their synonyms, I shall consider here James’ two forms of “wisdom” in parallel columns. By such a method the real significance of both “pure” and “peaceable” will become plain:

THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE	THE WISDOM FROM BENEATH
1. Let the wise show his manner of life by his works with meekness of wisdom (v. 13).	1. The foolish shows his manner of life by his words, seeking domination (v. 1) by boldly blessing God while cursing men (vv. 9-12).
2. His wisdom is from above, born of God, and therefore PURE, loving, guileless, and single.	2. The “wisdom” from beneath is natural: earthly, sensual, and demoniacal (v. 15). Rather than purifying, it is defiling (v. 6).
3. PEACEABLE: This is really the first and foremost characteristic of the “pure wisdom from above” (v. 18).	3. By contrast, earthly wisdom is conducive to “envying and strife” (vv. 14,16).
4. GENTLE: Forbearing, patient, careful.	4. An “unruly” tongue (v. 8), leaving in its wake “confusion (tumult, unquietness) and every evil work” (v. 16).
5. EASY TO BE INTREATED: “Open to reason” (RSV).	5. Unapproachable, boastful — with a tongue no man can tame (v. 8).
6. FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS.	6. “Full of deadly poison”, i.e. cursing (v. 8).
7. WITHOUT PARTIALITY, wrangling or uncertainty. <i>Adiakritos</i> : “not to be parted or separated”.	7. Having a “double standard”: “With our tongues we bless God and curse men” (v. 9).
8. WITHOUT HYPOCRISY; i.e. being single (or pure) in purpose.	8. “Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish?” (vv. 11,12). “Glory not and lie not against the truth” (v. 14).

Thus it may clearly be seen that “peace”, far from being nonexistent until an artificial “purity” has been imposed, is instead a virtue *always* to be desired. Indeed, how could one instructed at all in the wisdom of God ever contend that any of the other qualities enumerated along with purity are not to be desired *at all times*? Should one be gentle only after the opposition has been beaten into flight or submission? Should one be merciful only after his striving has left nothing and no one to be forgiven?

“‘First’ and ‘then’ are not references to a sequence of events — get the wisdom pure and peace will follow — but to the relationship between the characteristics of the wisdom that is from above. It is above all else pure, and consequently is ‘peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy’...’But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart, glory not, and lie not against the truth.’ The path of doctrinal purity, in any sense of the word, does not lie along that road, since nothing can be of God that causes confusion and strife” (*Ibid.*; compare also P. Adams, “First Pure, Then Peaceable”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 30, No. 360 — Dec. 1960 — p. 429).

James crowns his discussion of heavenly wisdom with an allusion to the “sermon” of Christ on the mount:

“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by them that make peace” (James 3:18).

The “pure” and the “peaceable” of James’ discourse are now seen as a conscious imitation of the thought (and even the order) of Matthew 5:8,9: (1) “Blessed are the *pure in heart*”; and (2) “Blessed are the *peacemakers*”.

Also, James’ simile of the fruit trees (v. 12) and his allusion to the “fruit” of righteousness (v. 18) are echoes of the Lord’s figure of speech in the same discourse:

“Beware of false prophets... ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit” (Matt. 7:15-17).

As did Christ, James foresaw that men would sow destruction and confusion in the field of God. The damage that such men would cause by their schismatic tendencies, born of jealousy and pride, would have to be counteracted by the pure and peaceable and gentle actions of others. With this in mind James speaks of the tree. There is a tree that is righteousness, and righteousness is its fruit. It is firmly planted, rooted in the truth, and nourished by the soft showers of heavenly wisdom. Its fruit is harvested and then sown by the peacemakers who are pure in heart. The product will be many “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified” (Isa. 61:3). But there is a condition for this planting in which God works with and through men: it must be done “in peace”, for strife is destructive of the very seed of righteousness.

* * * * *

Brother Carter, late editor of *The Christadelphian*, under the heading “A Plea for Uncalled-for Disunion”, wrote as follows:

“The title is not ours; it is one given by bro. Roberts in a call for sober and fair judgment at a time when feeling was running high just after bro. Andrew’s teaching had caused years of contention followed by division. Some were for pressing too far their demands upon fellow believers under the guise of ‘PURITY OF TRUTH’, and belaboured bro. Roberts for lack of zeal because he would not endorse their efforts. Some have thought of bro. Roberts as a fiery zealot always leading division. He certainly combatted, and rightly so, important and vital errors that were at different times introduced in the community. But it is clear that it was not a fanatical zeal that moved him. He recognized that there were other duties — teaching, guiding, instructing, promoting unity where vital issues were not involved. Three pamphlets were reviewed by him which he variously described as ‘Plea for Unsound Union’, ‘Plea for Uncalled-for Disunion’, and ‘Plea for Apostasy’. He repudiated all three pleas, and we endorse his attitude” (Vol. 93, No. 1104 — June 1956 — p. 224).

To this we would add certain of Robert Roberts’ thoughts in his own words:

“It is well to be zealous for ecclesial purity; but if we are to abstain from ecclesial association till we find an ecclesia that is perfect, we shall never have ecclesial association at all. We must have compassion as well as zeal. We are all imperfect, and unless we practice some of the charity that ‘hides a multitude of sins’, we shall hinder and destroy instead of helping one another” (“Ecclesial Notes”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 23, No. 263 — May 1886 — p. 230).

To his words may be added those of other staunch brothers:

“The aim of the gospel is to convert and edify, not to divide. Division is an evil, whether necessary or not. The loss of disciples through apostasy, even when it becomes inevitable, is still grievous. And many losses may well have occurred, not because members were caught out in apostasy, but because some mistaken person or group thought that one must not be peaceable until purity has been attained. And of course this is not what James is saying.... The wisdom from above is pure, but it is folly to think of it in terms of purity alone, or to imagine that it can entertain purity in isolation from the warming qualities which make it at once divine in its origin and human in its sympathies. The whole theme of this exalted homily is *against* the pursuit of so-called purity for its own sake alone, and *for* a righteousness which bears peace as its fruit at the hands of peacemakers” (A.D. Norris, *Bible Missionary*, No. 42 — July 1971 — pp. 2,3).

“My conviction is that we, as a body, are in a thousand times greater danger through failure in this matter of brotherly love than in those doubtful issues which have exercised so many of our members. When once controversy has started there is usually a tendency on all sides to multiply the sins of unfairness, misrepresentation, and all the other fleshly evils that arise from strife. Stones are thrown where bread should be given. The Scriptures will save us if we will allow them to have free course, but we must search them for food and medicine and not merely for weapons” (I. Collyer, *An Appeal to Christadelphians*, p. 5).

37. “All Speak the Same Thing” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

It has been my experience that such verses have been sadly distorted by those who justify divisions. Their reasoning is circuitous and tortuous: ‘Paul says we should all agree perfectly and have no divisions. Our ecclesial members do not agree perfectly on such-and-such. Consequently we must divide from those who disagree, in order that we have no divisions among us!’

It does not take a genius to see that there is something wrong with such logic. The point overlooked is this: Paul is admonishing the brethren to the pursuit of an ideal — perfect oneness in mind and spirit among the brethren. Just because the ecclesia does not immediately achieve such harmony is no reason to throw up one’s hands and separate. Does Paul say here anything about separation? Even an imperfect unity must be preserved and nurtured, not dismantled because it has a flaw.

“Fellowship is primarily a ‘community of interest’ rather than individual advantage. It is the family sharing which keeps Father, Son and believers in a unity of belief as well as purpose; and as far as Father and Son are concerned, this unity is an unbreakable one. But in the hands of believers in the ecclesia it can be a fragile thing, so unpredictable is the human heart. Paul was very conscious of this and exhorted the Corinthian ecclesia: ‘Now I beseech you, brethren,.. that ye be *perfectly joined together*.’

“In practice this vital doctrine of the unity of the Household cannot be manifested without the dedicated effort of every member of each ecclesia. It is, by the Father’s will and help, a cooperative and precious creation made possible by the shed blood of Jesus. This whole conception of fellowship is at once magnificent and humbling; but it can be broken: by the disagreement of an individual member with his ecclesia, or vice-versa” (J. Marshall, “The Living Ecclesia”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 108, No. 1280 — Feb. 1971 — p. 56).

In the same context of his Corinthian letter, the apostle stresses that the brethren were *called* unto the fellowship of God’s Son (v. 9). It is a striking concept, reminiscent of the Lord’s words: “I will *draw* all men to me” (John 12:32) and “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out” (6:37). Here is the strongest affirmation of the principle that our “fellowship” is not ours alone — it is God’s and Christ’s. And any unilateral attempts by men to subvert or destroy this sublime unity, without clear and certain and incontrovertible evidence from the Bible, is a direct affront to Heaven.

Far from commanding an absolute unity as a condition of fellowship, Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1:10 strongly suggest just the opposite: that differences of opinion and internal schisms already existed in Corinth, and whilst not approved, were at the least preferable to out-and-out division. For Paul to say ‘Brethren, we must agree’ is certainly *not* the same as saying ‘We must excommunicate all those who do not agree’. Paul was far from being a Pope!

Such fallacious reasoning reminds us of what we might call the “divorce syndrome”. To wit: ‘Paul says our marriage must conform to the divine ideal. Since it does not, then it is not a proper marriage. Therefore we will divorce and each seek another marriage that will reflect the perfect ideal.’ Such an attitude, we trust, will be seen by all to be hopelessly unrealistic. Who can fail to see that the divine ideal of marriage is something to be *sought* by all husbands and wives, as they seek to overcome their failures and press on toward the mark? Why cannot we all see, also, that this is the proper attitude toward that “marriage” of brethren in the ecclesia? Why must we demand “perfection of fellowship” as the price of unity when experience sadly shows us that *nothing else in this life is ever perfect*? Why cannot we learn to conquer petty differences and put up with relatively trivial abrasions on our way to achieving a closer approximation of the divine ideal? This is all that Christ — and Paul — would have us to do.

In the first-century ecclesias some were “unskillful” while others were able to partake of “strong meat” (Heb. 5:11-14). Some were “babes” while others were “fathers”. Some were “yet carnal” (1 Cor. 3:3) while others possessed high degrees of spirituality. And it is the same today. In the absolute sense, then, it is impossible that all brethren have “the same mind and the same judgment”. Some will always be more advanced than others, and some will always present problems to the rest. True fellowship, like true freedom, does not consist in a rigid like-mindedness on all things — that is an impossible wish! *True fellowship and true freedom does consist in the limited toleration of differences*, allowing scope for development in the truth at an individual pace, while the strong patiently help rather than criticize and condemn the weak.

“It must be confessed that divisions oftentimes take place which could be avoided without prejudicing the truth in any way. A little more patience, a little more kindness, a little less sense of personal pride and self-importance, a

little more discrimination between essential and non-essential elements of belief — How many a division would thus have been avoided!

“To create a division would appear to be considered by some as a very meritorious act, and a proof of zeal and stability in the truth, whereas it often arises that it is a proof of pride, bitterness, and a wayward determination to get one’s way at any cost. The truth is that the making of divisions has become far too easy a process, and the time has come when a little resistance should be made to the disintegrating spirit in our midst; and which, if allowed to go unchecked, will work disaster and split the brotherhood into useless shreds... These little ecclesias of ours up and down the land are worth keeping; and any needless disruptive tendency must be strongly resisted” (D. Hughes, “A House Divided”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 40, No. 467 — May 1903 — pp. 203,204).

Paul continues in his Corinthian letter:

“Now this I say, that everyone of you saith, ‘I am of Paul’, and ‘I of Apollos’; and ‘I of Cephas’; and ‘I of Christ’. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:12,13).

In another section (Chapter 18) I considered the teaching of this verse on the matter of fellowship. Now I shall simply note some of the other similar passages in the apostolic writings, which stress this same all-out commitment to unity and peace and edification, or (negatively expressed) to what C.C. Walker calls “the resistance of unnecessary division” (*The Christadelphian*, Vol. 40, No. 467 — May 1903 — p. 204). Paul himself commands the Roman brethren:

“Be of the same mind one toward another... Condescend to men of low estate... Be not wise in your own conceits” (Rom. 12:16).

Peter also:

“Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing” (1 Pet. 3:8,9).

And:

“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility” (5:5).

In all of the above, it is to be pointedly stressed that the way to achieve “the same mind” is *not* to divide from those of a different mind, but as the apostles say, to be condescending, compassionate, and humble. Have we as a brotherhood sincerely and in a wholehearted manner sought this peace and unity? Or have we too often, for the most personal and self-serving of motives, undermined the ecclesial good in the perpetuation of controversies of quite secondary importance? The article by Brother Hughes, quoted above, written in 1903, concludes with some words of almost prophetic import:

“If we go on everlastingly agitating on unimportant points, everlastingly dividing and subdividing, the superstructure of the truth, which it has cost so much to re-erect in these latter years, will crumble away and leave behind an irreparable loss. ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to destruction, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand’ (Matt. 12:25; Luke 11:17)” (*Op. cit.*, p. 204).

38. “From Such Withdraw Thyself” (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words... and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words... from such withdraw thyself.”

This passage is quickly quoted to justify separatism, generally with little regard to its context. A close review of that context yields the following observations:

1. “If any man *teach* otherwise”: The warning here should be limited to the “teacher”, the active trafficker in some sort of error (the context should tell us what sort). It should not necessarily apply to the passive, ill-informed hearer or receiver

of such error. Neither should it apply to the ecclesia established on a sound basis that may number among its members one who teaches a different doctrine. There is absolutely no thought here about the disfellowship of a whole ecclesia for its failure to disfellowship an errorist!

2. The “doctrine”, in the Scriptural sense “teaching”, against which Paul warns is a *moral* teaching contrary to godliness. Verses 1-5 should be taken as a whole: if any man counsels slaves to disobey their masters (v. 1) or to shirk their duties (v. 2), or if he proudly refuses righteous instruction, being envious and perverse (v. 4), or if he supposes that “gain is godliness” (v. 5), then this type of man should be marked.
3. The phrase “From such withdraw thyself” is omitted altogether in most versions, including the Diaglott, RV, RSV, NEB, and NIV! Can we really be sure that these words are valid?
4. There is little if any Bible precedent for using the word “withdraw” to describe the disfellowship of erring brethren. But to some it is a very attractive word, because it seems to convey an open-mindedness with regard to “judging” one’s brethren. In other words, ‘We do not condemn you nor cut you off. We simply *withdraw* from you as a matter of conscience.’ But this is really trifling with words. Of course, in the *final* sense, we cannot cut anyone off from Christ. If, however, we “withdraw” from our brethren, we do cut them off from our personal association, and no amount of careful wording can relieve us of the responsibility of such action — either for good or ill. The possibility of wrongdoing in hasty or improper excommunication (*this* is the more Biblical term!) is not mitigated by referring to the same act by a milder word. (The same point applies to the use of that euphemistic invention “stand aside”!)
5. Even if the questionable phrase is allowed to stand, it may signify that Timothy was to withdraw himself from such *ideas* as the love of gain, and strife and disputings. Paul’s basic thought is continued in vv. 6-10, and summarized by the warning in v. 11: “Flee these *things*”. This is a far cry from “withdrawing” from the brethren guilty of such things (T. Haltom and G. Booker, *Godliness With Contentment*, p. 120).
6. Those things that Paul condemns sound, strangely, very much like the qualities most common among many ecclesial agitators for “pure fellowship”:
 1. “Consenting not to wholesome [or healthful] words”: Often brethren consumed with a passionate hatred for some single “false doctrine” lose sight of the destructive effect their words and actions are having on others. Their constant contention may militate against the growth of the qualities that make for edification and godliness in the body as a whole.
 2. “Proud, knowing nothing”: These are those who pose as Bible students, often without realizing the extent of their own ignorance. Ecclesial life has not infrequently been plagued by such men.
 3. “Doting about questions”: The subject matter of many Christadelphian divisions can be seen, in retrospect, to have consisted of too much speculation in unprofitable questions, and of too long concentration on a very narrow area of interest while failing to appreciate the “big picture”.
 4. “Strifes of words” — *logomachia* — “word-battles”. Much trouble has come upon the brotherhood during the last century in just this form. Problems have arisen because of carelessness in the use of words, unwillingness to clarify meanings, and the tossing back and forth of slogans and epithets which may unfairly characterize the beliefs of others. Phrases like “clean flesh”, “Adamic condemnation”, “open door”, “enlightened rejector”, and a host of other technical trivia become the touchstones of controversy, with devastating results. Ordinary brethren are swept along and drowned in a sea of uncertainty — wondering who is right and who is wrong.
 5. “Envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings”: “Word-wars” bring all these qualities to the fore. They encourage brethren to deceive, to misrepresent, and to foster suspicions against their “adversaries”. “Word-wars” set battle lines, sides are chosen, cliques are formed. Sadly it reminds us of the world of political intrigue, with which no true believer should have any connection. “From *such* withdraw thyself.”

39. Earnest Contention (Jude 3)

When Jude wrote his warning to the saints of the first century, he certainly had reason to be alarmed. There seems to have been a tremendously dangerous problem at large; those who were disrupting the ecclesias were not even described as brethren — they were “certain men.... *ungodly* men” (v. 4). Jude’s other terms for them are even worse: lascivious, brute beasts, greedy, lustful, mockers, sensual. It is hard to imagine sins heinous enough among the brethren of today ever to justify such terms.

Even though Jude says that these men “deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 4), it is most unlikely that they would deny association with Christ altogether. More likely they were such as those against whom John warned in his second epistle: teachers who so confounded the nature and the work of the Savior that in their minds the gospel message was hopelessly distorted.

In judging from the catalogue of vices of these men, and considering those with whom they were compared, it would appear that they were of the “libertine” school. To such men nothing done in the flesh was truly sin, for they possessed a

superior knowledge. It was the old lie of the serpent: that there is nothing wrong in “experiencing” all aspects of life—the evil with the good. “Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound.”

“The question must be asked: were these monstrously dangerous false brethren in fellowship with those to whom Jude wrote? From verse 12 it would seem they were: ‘these are a blot on your love feasts, where they eat and drink without reverence’ (NEB). On the other hand in verse 19 Jude says of them; ‘it is they who set up divisions.’ Presumably if they were in the ecclesia it was only in order to draw it away from the faithful brotherhood into an orbit of their own in which they would be ‘wandering stars’ “ (A. Eyre, “Problems of Fellowship in the First Century Ecclesia”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 108, No. 1283 — May 1971 — pp. 210,211).

In such a distressing situation it is certainly understandable that Jude would rise to sound an alarm. If ever there were a time to protect the flock from the wolves, it was then.

“It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (v. 3).

However, considering the enormity of the errors rampant (worse, it must be admitted, than anything that has troubled the brotherhood in modern times), Jude shows a remarkable restraint in his instructions as to the type of contention to be waged. First, he emphasizes the positive actions that should counteract the evil influences:

“Build up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God....” (vv. 20,21).

And secondly, he implies that *God* will judge these sinners in due time — all of his examples and comparisons tending toward this view. It was *God* Himself who singled out the generation of Israel to die in the wilderness (v. 5); it was *God* who sent forth the fire and earthquake against Korah and his followers (v. 11). Even Michael, an archangel, does not bring a railing accusation against his adversary (whoever that might be is irrelevant to this discussion), but merely promises that *God* will rebuke him (v. 9). These evil men against whom Jude warns were present at the “love feasts” (v. 12) — the Breaking of Bread! — yet Jude writes not a word commanding their exclusion!

Despite the seriousness of the sins, Jude does not command a blanket disfellowship of the false teachers, much less of their deluded followers. His view is the same as that of Brother Thomas, who, in writing of the same period, stated his belief that the “Antipas” class could “contend earnestly for the faith” quite effectively and Scripturally even while continuing as members of very *imperfect* ecclesias (*Eureka*, Vol. 1, p. 335).

As with some of the other passages we have just been considering, Jude 3 is made by some to carry a very heavy weight. Much more is inferred from it than the context will bear. True, there are times when brethren must “contend for the faith”, but must that “contention” involve the excommunication of guilty, possibly guilty, and uninformed “tolerators” alike? And how much of all the “contention” which seeks its justification from Jude 3 is contention for one’s own views and opinions and importance rather than contention for the faith?

“It is easy for men to deceive themselves into thinking that unrighteous and unjust extremes are simply the evidence of their zeal for truth. Even a readiness to listen to the accused is regarded as weakness. Such extremists cry shame on the very effort to be fair, and in their determination to have no compromise with error they sometimes exaggerate faults, and so grossly misrepresent the objects of their attack that they become guilty of offences worse than all the error against which they are trying to fight.

“We must not fall into the mistake of taking an extreme view even of the extremist. God has been merciful to such men in the past, and we must be merciful now even in our thoughts. We may state most emphatically, however, that it is wrong to exaggerate the faults of anyone or to find ugly and misleading names with which to label those who do not quite see eye to eye with us. It is quite possible to be valiant for the Truth and zealous for the Lord without being unfair even to those who are mistaken, and it is always wrong to be unfair. In faithfulness we must point out the danger that in great zeal for the jots and tittles of the law men may lose sight of the foundation principles. All their faith and works may become valueless through lack of charity” (I. Collyer, “The Scriptural Principles Governing Controversy”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 61, No. 722 — Aug. 1924 — p. 344).

It is not necessarily true, then, that all contention is proper or profitable. Jude has more to say of contention than simply in v. 3. It is possible, he says, that men, in thinking they do God service, may “speak evil of those things they know not” (v. 10), and in their accusations and antagonisms become as “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame” (v. 13).

“Indeed there is a spirit which strives against impurity which is itself impure; furthermore where the spirit is right but the method is wrong there may be a generation of heat without light” (C. Tennant, “The Epistle of Jude”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 104, No. 1239 — Sept. 1967 — p. 404). James adds his voice to the same effect:

“Whence come wars and fightings — contentions! — among you?”

Because you are zealous to contend for the truth? Not always!

“Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (4:1)

We must always remember that the greatest abhorrence of sin is not necessarily found in the one who is most condemning of the sinner, and that in contention for truth the loudest and most self-confident voice is not always the best. The example of Christ should serve us well when we are faced with ecclesial problems. From him we learn that patience and tact and love and prayer are our most effective tools. We do possess a “sword”, and we may finally have to use it. But let us not rush headlong into every controversy with it drawn. Like the surgeon’s scalpel, it must be the last resort, after all other possible healing attempts have conclusively failed.

40. “A Little Leaven” (1 Corinthians 5)

“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven... the leaven of malice and wickedness” (vv. 6-8).

These words are often quoted as supplying the reason for the rooting out of false doctrine. The application made of them is this: ‘Just as leaven, given time, permeates and changes the whole mass of dough, so also any single difficulty in any ecclesia will inevitably ruin the otherwise good character of the rest.’

It needs to be emphasized that what Paul is talking about in this chapter is *bad behavior, not false ideas*. The context (do some folks *ever* look at context?) is the case of incest:

“a fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife” (v. 1).

This open flouting of all moral restraints on the part of one was aggravated by the permissive, even proud and defiant, attitude of the ecclesia:

“And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you” (v. 2).

In the entire chapter there is no hint of doctrinal error. This simple fact makes it clear that the words quoted are being made to do duty for a purpose other than their original intention.

Objection to a general application of this saying (“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”) is also made in the following:

“Long experience shows that whereas nothing contributes to the lowering of tone in an ecclesia like persistent bad behaviour, it is possible for the community to immunize itself almost completely from the cranky ideas of one member, be he never so good a propagandist. Paul’s words [however] are absolutely true in the field of morals” (H. Whittaker, “Block Disfellowship: Is It Taught in the Bible?”, *The Testimony*, Vol. 43, No. 512 — Aug. 1973 — p. 312).

In the case of Corinth, what made the sin “leaven” was the proud willingness to allow its influence to affect the whole of the ecclesia. And even should we talk of doctrinal divergence as “leaven”, then it is still true that one false teacher does not introduce the “leaven” singlehandedly. He usually has to have the approbation of the arranging brethren or the whole ecclesia. In supporting this deviation in their midst, and taking no steps to correct or isolate the problem, it is in fact *they* who are introducing the leaven.

“In the case of 1 Corinthians 5 the evil was not only unrepented of, it had not been repudiated by the ecclesia, although it was the case of open and manifest sin. The second epistle, however, shows the response of the ecclesia to rebuke, and also (so at any rate many would interpret it) the restoration of the repentant sinner (2 Cor. 2:5-11; 7:8-11)... It is, as Paul showed, the ecclesia’s responsibility to judge open sin, and to repudiate it while

doing all possible for the recovery of the sinner (1 Cor. 5:12,13)" (L.G. Sargent, "Why Not Ask?", *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 105, No. 1247 — May 1968 — pp. 218,219).

As to those who resort to this passage for proof of the necessity to separate from error, how often have they been as eager and energetic to seek the reclamation of the brethren whom they brand in the most infamous terms? If we follow the apostle's example (supposedly) in purging out any that offend, then we must endeavor to follow his example also in fervently seeking their reinstatement. This, in the case of "false doctrine", would involve a most serious effort to bring about reunion of the divided sections of the brotherhood — especially when the ones who "caused" the divisions by their peculiar ideas have now in some cases been dead for years.

A further point that must be made in regard to 1 Corinthians 5 — as has been already made for other passages: Even *if* this passage may be used of those who teach wrongly concerning the first principles, it still goes no further than demanding that the single ecclesia purge out its *own* "leaven". There is no hint that failure to do so would result in the Corinthian ecclesia being expelled from the worldwide association of all her sister-ecclesias.

And finally....

"If the application so often put on this passage be granted, it becomes a terrible ground of censure of those who apply it thus. For, if the leaven of false teaching really leavens so drastically, how is it that the writings of the 'spiritually decadent' are read, scrutinised, criticised, and discussed so vigorously? If such activities do not 'leaven' some who are doctrinally 'pure', why should they be so damaging to others?" (Whittaker, *op. cit.*)

It is in the nature of leaven, and indeed it is the only reason for ever using the figure, that it changes the basic nature of any material with which it comes into contact. If this proves not to be the case with something that is called "leaven", then the whole argument with regard to that divergence — whether in morals or doctrine — collapses.

Using this criterion, certain retroactive tests may be made. The Christadelphian body has experienced many grievous divisions, ostensibly to excise "leaven" from pure dough in each case. If the thesis were correct that those errors or so-called errors would have a leavening influence on the rest, then it should be true that the body that contained such leaven would be by now thoroughly leavened. But this is just not the case! What has actually happened many times is that the teaching, or perhaps action, that aroused so much indignation in other ecclesial circles far removed from the center has quietly sunk into oblivion, never again to trouble anyone *except* those who separated themselves prematurely and who, to justify their separation, continue to be exercised about a long-dead issue.

One of the main historical reasons for one "pure fellowship" group's separation from the main body of believers was the queer ideas of a rather eccentric brother; this brother circulated several pamphlets on the nature and sacrifice of Christ in the early part of this century. His uncertain speculations were not summarily repudiated by more responsible brethren elsewhere (though neither were they accepted), and the pages of the break-away periodical were for years filled with denunciations of the leavening nature of his work. Some seventy years have now passed since all this began, and one occasionally still reads criticisms of this brother and of his "toleration" by others. But his writings have completely vanished, and no one else has to our knowledge ever taken up those ideas he so weakly articulated. It was told me by another brother who once belonged to one of the separated ecclesias that, in his travels, he had visited the old ecclesia of that long-dead brother. The ecclesia met in a hall with an extensive library, and our friend began a search therein for some of the brother's questionable writings. He found none and so asked a brother of that meeting where they were kept; this brother in fact was a relative of the original perpetrator of the questionable ideas. "Oh, we wouldn't have that sort of thing around here!" was the immediate reply. And so it seems that the only ecclesias where the old "leaven" still exists are those who supposedly "purged" it out in the first place, but who still keep a few "fragments" under wraps on the "top shelf" to demonstrate to later generations how terrible it really was!

Returning to a more positive conclusion here, we should endeavor to make an application of these verses to ourselves *individually*, for certainly this was Paul's intention, as v. 8 would indicate:

"Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

We could do no better than conclude with the following quotation:

"To this day the Orthodox Jew is ruthless in the exclusion of all leaven (or yeast) from his home for the seven day feast [i.e., of Passover]; even to the extent of using a special set of cutlery, crockery and cooking utensils lest a

trace should be left on that normally used. In many cases this is merely a slavish adherence to the letter of the law but we can take a lesson from it. Should we not be just as diligent and just as ruthless *ourselves* with *our* lives, with *our* thoughts, words and deeds to exclude from *them* anything savouring of malice or evil? Bearing in mind *the nature of the evil which Paul had in mind* at this time the warning is surely not to be lightly passed over when we live in a world rapidly becoming as *morally* degenerate as was the world by which the brethren and sisters at Corinth were surrounded. Such moral depravity must at all costs be kept at bay, and *the only way this can possibly be done is by each one purging from his or her heart the old leaven* that as a community we may be a new lump, as we are unleavened" (E. Toms, "Christ Our Passover", *The Dawn Ecclesial Magazine*, Vol. 21, No. 12 — Dec. 1960 — pp. 280,281).

41. "Come Out From Among Them" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

"What communion [koinonia] hath light with darkness?... Therefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (vv. 14,17).

This passage has always been popular with separatists, but it is even more sorely misapplied than are some of the others we have considered. The context clearly speaks of a life of unrighteousness. From such a worldly outlook and way of life the believers are certainly prohibited, since such a joining is an "unequal yoking with *unbelievers*". But it is a peculiar wresting of Scripture which would take this passage and wield it in cutting off *believers* for some minor deviation, real or imagined!

The entire passage is much richer and more detailed than one would ever imagine from a cursory reading. Each phrase is fully expounded in a series of articles by Brother David Parry — in which practical applications are precisely drawn (*The Testimony*, Vol. 46, pp. 218-220, 270-272, 311-314, 341-344, 427-429, and 452-455; Vol. 47, pp. 70-74). These exhortational conclusions reveal once and for all the moral force of the passage, in contrast to the mere legalistic approach in "withholding fellowship" at the breaking of bread. We have certainly come to see by now, if we had not realized it already, that "fellowship" is a much broader and more meaningful concept for believers than the question of whom we exclude from "our" table (which is not even *ours*, but *Christ's*). Fellowship with God is a way of life that permeates all corners of our lives, and calls us constantly upward to a fuller appreciation of life lived always in the presence, and in the household, of our Heavenly Father. Those who convince themselves that their duty in the way of "separation" is accomplished when they ruthlessly exclude some or many of their brethren from their "fellowship" have simply not understood as yet what "fellowship" is all about! And it just may be that, in giving undue attention to one area of responsibility, they are on their way to ignoring other, more far-reaching duties!

We shall briefly summarize the passage:

1. **Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers** (v. 14): Only two can wear a yoke, and they must agree together in the direction they are traveling. We are commanded to be yoked with Christ (Matt. 11:28,29), and we can be yoked with no other at the same time.

"The call of Christ is to a complete way of life — it is all-sufficient. Failure to realize that when Christ spoke of two ways, he meant two and no more, has led men to try and walk in both, looking for a third. For the Christian partnership to work, the believer must at all times try to match the example of his Master. The only incentive is to think deeply of the work being performed together. Unless positive reasons for a life in Christ are understood, the yoke of Christ will chafe and the discipline be irksome" (*Ibid.*, p. 220).

2. **What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?** (v. 14): This word "fellowship" might best be translated "partnership", a joint partaking in something. Righteousness describes the ethical standard by which God offers men salvation. It is the pattern of life in Christ. It is impossible that there should be any partnership between this way of living and its exact opposite — unrighteousness, or lawlessness.

3. **What communion hath light with darkness?** (v. 14): This word "communion" is the common word for "fellowship" — *koinonia*. To think of fellowship between light and darkness is to consider an impossibility, for the two cannot in any way exist side by side. Those who say they fellowship light and yet *walk* in darkness are liars (1 John 1:5-7). Correct beliefs are necessary, but our fellowship in light must be *proven* by the *actions* of a new life (1 John 2:29; 3:7; John 3:19-21; 8:39; 10:37). The Bible definition of walking in darkness is not holding false doctrine, but hating one's brother (1 John 2:11)!

4. **What concord hath Christ with Belial?** (v. 15): “Concord”, relating to the English word “symphony”, expresses the idea of harmony in singing or other verbal expression. In Christ’s life the “symphony” has already been composed. Each performer and each instrument should be controlled by that original plan. We as the players bring our individual talents to bear upon the composer’s score. But we cannot “play our own tune”, or else there will be discord and not concord in the finished product. Trying to follow both Christ and Belial (idols) is like singing two songs at once. How much easier to follow the example set by Christ, so that there be true harmony in our lives!

5. **What part hath he that believeth with an infidel?** (v. 15): Here is the idea of sharing, or having a portion or an inheritance, which may be understood against the Old Testament background of the promised possession of the land.

“Believers and unbelievers have nothing in common which they can share. The believer cannot take part in activities and associations which are not controlled by God. The believer cannot share his inheritance, nor allow it to be taken away by unholy men. He can, and must, seek to share his inheritance by converting the unbeliever; but he must take care that this work is the one that God has described in His Word. The Lord is the portion, the Hope of Israel, the founder of the New Jerusalem. It is His inheritance, His kingdom, His memorial” (*Ibid.*, p. 429).

6. **What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?** (v. 16): This question involves the idea of putting together, or a joint deposit, particularly of votes. The ecclesia is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19); its members must cast in their “votes”, and their hopes and aspirations, with their brethren — not with the “idols”, crude or sophisticated, religious or secular, around them. The temptation to cast in one’s lot and find apparent satisfaction with the godless of today is a strong one to the modern saint. The only real antidote is not knowledge alone but application to the example of Christ.

“Therefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (v. 17):

“The teaching of these words as highlighted by Paul involves an equal determination on the part of a Christian to become holy through separation from unrighteousness, darkness, Belial, unbelievers, and idols. The far-reaching implications of these words are now obvious and it behoves those who would apply them in very limited circumstances to take care that in casting the first stone they are not condemning themselves” (*Ibid.*, p. 72).

42. “Whose Mouths Must Be Stopped” (Titus 1:11)

The party in the Cretan ecclesia or ecclesias to which these words applied were “they of the circumcision” (v. 10). These Judaizers were a great and constant source of opposition to the truth as it was in Christ, and it was periodically necessary to warn new converts against their Jewish fables and traditions (v. 14).

The particular disciples to whom Paul here refers must have been unusually dangerous, in view of his further comments:

“...who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake... liars, evil beasts, slow bellies...” (vv. 11,12).

It is difficult to imagine such strong language ever being applicable to brethren today. Hence Paul’s warning has an unusually hard edge: “Rebuke them *sharply*” (v. 13), he says. The first step must be to cause these brethren to cease their propaganda. When the agitation has died down, then hopefully a policy of instruction and restoration may be set in motion.

As in many New Testament passages, there is implied here a great gulf between ecclesial action toward the active offenders and toward the more passive followers. The *mouths* of the *teachers* must be stopped. But the *minds* of the *hearers*, if already confused, must be set right. Certainly there is no warrant in this verse, neither in any of the previous verses, for a “blanket” disfellowship of errorists and “tolerators” alike. Paul, ever the shepherd of the Lord’s flock, simply did not advocate such a policy.

It would be pleasant indeed if there were no such problems in the ecclesias such as “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers” (v. 10). However, these things are part of the necessary pattern of our training and development.

“It is important that the Truth be defended, but it is equally important that it be done with the pure, calm sword of the *Spirit*, and not with any of the ugly weapons of the flesh, since, ‘The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God’ (James 1:20). It takes no special effort or ability to criticize and condemn error. Any limited minds can do that, and enjoy the boost it gives their ego. But it takes much self-discipline and self-preparation to confront error with a calm manifestation of personal godliness and a constructive, upbuilding presentation of the

deep beauties of the Truth” (G.V. Growcott, “Zealous of Good Works”, *The Berean Christadelphian*, Vol. 56, No. 8 — Aug. 1968 — p. 240).

Here is the problem that, sooner or later, faces all ecclesias and all brethren. It is easy enough to be like Peter in Gethsemane, to “sleep” while the crisis is brewing, then to awake suddenly, grab the “sword” and “cut off” an ear, thinking this is the only way to serve God (Luke 22:45,50). But it is far more difficult, though infinitely more spiritual, to do as the Master did: wait and watch, pray and prepare, consider the alternatives, and then act gently but firmly, with an eye to healing and not rending (v. 51). It is true, sometimes mouths must be stopped. But this can often be done without resort to cutting off heads!

And what else may be learned from this passage in Titus 1? Surely there is a warning to all of us, whether Judaizers or not, in regard to vain talking and gainsaying:

“It would seem that the Judaizers’ contention was largely to gain a debating ascendancy and to display their intellectual skill. Is the same possible in an advocacy of the Truth? Is it possible to be an exponent of the Truth and yet be a vain talker and deceiver? It is possible to ‘preach Christ even of envy and strife... of contention, not sincerely’ (Phil. 1:15,16), to engage in wordy warfare for the sake of a verbal victory and for the elevation of human pride... We received the Truth with meekness of heart; we should live the Truth with lowliness of mind, and we should be ‘gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves’ (2 Tim. 2:24,25)” (W. Mitchell, “The Epistle of Titus”, *The Dawn Ecclesial Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 11 — Nov. 1957 — p. 255).

43. “Unfruitful Works of Darkness” (Ephesians 5:11)

Here again it is perfectly clear that the context is one of deeds and not of “doctrine” (in the commonly used sense). When the apostle speaks of “having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness”, we need have no doubt as to what he means: fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, crude jesting, and idolatry (vv. 3-5). That Paul is speaking of conduct is emphasized furthermore by the three-fold “walk” of the passage (vv. 2,8,15).

That with which we are to have no fellowship, therefore, is the unclean way of life that belongs to the darkness of this world. If need be that we personify this “darkness”, then let us not look at our brethren in a critical sense, but instead let us first examine *ourselves* (1 Cor. 11:28). He whom we should be quick to “disfellowship”, if anyone, on the basis of this passage, must be the “old man”, who is corrupt according to his deceitful lusts (Eph. 4:22), the “devil” within each of us (4:27).

Is there ever a time that such a passage should be turned against our brethren? Yes, sadly, there may be such times, when faithful brethren are forced to examine the conduct of their brethren. How shall we go about this in a Christ-like manner, being sure that we do not zealously overstep our prerogative and disfellowship those whom Christ would forgive?

“The answer is that the very plainness of these commands helps us, for Scripture passes judgment on such matters. Truly we have to apply the judgment of Scripture, and there is danger of mistake in the application. It is the will of God that such responsibility should be ours and we must discharge the duty as faithfully as we can. We must try to remember the teaching of the Word as a whole, and we must be honest in the application of specific rules. If one quotes the passage regarding unfruitful works of darkness, things done in secret ‘of which it is a shame even to speak’, and applies the passage to one well reported of for good works, the only real complaint against him being that he is too reluctant to be severe with offenders, surely it is evident that in such an application there is the most amazing perversity. If one in resentment of a difference of judgment as to the precise application of these commands denounces his brother as guilty of disorderly walk, repudiation of the faith, and re-crucifixion of the Lord, it is difficult to believe in such a case that there is even an attempt to find righteous judgment” (I. Collyer, “The Principles Governing Fellowship”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 61, No. 721 — July 1924 — pp. 297,298).

44. “I Would They Were Even Cut Off” (Galatians 5:12)

The “cutting off” here has absolutely no relevance as a popular catchphrase to justify wholesale excommunication. In the first place, Paul displays a marked reluctance to be more drastic in action than necessary: “I *would* ...” is about as far from a peremptory command as can be imagined. Coupled with v. 10 — “*He* that troubleth you shall bear *his* judgment, whosoever *he* be” — this passages presents the picture of the inspired apostle as being far from in a hurry to apply the surgical knife — and this to *one* person! Where the rest are concerned, there is no hint of drastic discipline.

What would Paul say if he were to view the drastic and unwarranted “cutting off” from fellowship performed by some “purists” today? Might he not say something like this?: ‘I would they would *completely* cut off *everyone*, and then the rest of us might have some peace for the upbuilding of the ecclesias.’

But all of this is more or less beside the point, for it is almost certain that this verse has a very specialized meaning. The word “cut off” is *apokopto*, which means “to cut away”; it is so used of members of the body: “If thy hand offend thee, *cut it off*” (Mark 9:43,45); “Then Peter... *cut off* his right ear” (John 18:10,26). In Galatians 5:12 the verb is in the middle voice, thus signifying one of two things: either (a) to cut *oneself* off, metaphorically, from the “body” of Christ, or (b) literally to mutilate one’s own body, by cutting off one’s members.

The second of these two possibilities is favored by numerous versions:

“I wish those who unsettle you would mutilate themselves” (RSV).

“I would they would even mutilate themselves” (RV margin).

“As for these agitators, they had better go all the way and make eunuchs of themselves!” (NEB).

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, has been denouncing those who would make circumcision a “test of fellowship” (vv. 1-4,11).

“Why do they not, says Paul, since they have such faith in the knife, practice the complete mutilation which was common among the devotees of Cybele? In modern times this interpretation has been rejected on the grounds of coarseness, but if we remember that in turning to Judaism the Galatians were virtually turning back in principle to the rite of the nature worship of their pagan days... then Paul’s words practically mean that if the Judaizer were leading them back, then let him consistently go the whole way and in mutilation of self exhibit in symbol the destruction of self in the complete sense” (John Carter, *The Letter to the Galatians*, p. 123).

So Paul here is not referring to withdrawal of fellowship, but to castration! (If the idea still seems far-fetched, let it be noted that an early Christian “bishop”, Origen, in an excess of zeal, did this very thing!) An angry Paul, reserving his harshest language for those who would add new criteria for fellowship, is deriding the negative and destructive policy of “salvation by cutting-off” in the strongest possible terms. We do well to remind ourselves that the philosophy of “salvation by separation”, in one form or another, has been practiced throughout the ages. It is not newly sprung up in the twentieth century.

45. Distance and Fellowship

This final chapter is added to the section “The Objections Considered”, even though it is not a Scripture citation, because it is one of the mottoes which through long and perhaps careless use acquires almost the force of Scripture. Under this heading or something similar, some brethren would contend that great distances and lack of personal interaction do not mitigate one’s “fellowship” responsibility at all. In other words, an ecclesia (or an individual for that matter) must become acquainted with the facts in any alleged wrongdoing no matter where around the world, and take “fellowship” action, just as if the problem were local.

The especially sad thing about this line of reasoning is that it appeals for support to the very principles that should be the most uplifting and comforting to a believer in Christ — that is, the essential worldwide unity of faith of believers with Christ and one another — and makes these wonderful ideals the basis for unwarranted and hasty dismemberment of the spiritual Body. In the ultimate sense, neither distance nor time is a barrier to Biblical “fellowship”, for it was Christ himself who told the disciples, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). But only a very impractical person — or one thoroughly bent on a negative course of action — could fail to comprehend that distance, as well as time, can be a mitigating factor in the ability of fallible mortals to get at all the facts of a doubtful and disputed matter. Sometimes it is the course of wisdom to admit one’s inability to judge aright; sometimes the wisest words are simply: ‘I just don’t know for sure’.

Although in certain circumstances Brother Roberts is made out as a foremost exponent of this unrealistic fellowship approach, it is clear when considering all of his actions and writings that the practical outworking of such a “cut-and-dried” approach was quite different from the impression given by a few random citations.

An actual example, which concerned the brethren in my locality, serves well as illustration:

In 1883 a group of Texas brethren submitted a “position paper” concerning a regional controversy to *The Christadelphian*, requesting its publication. (The exact nature of the difficulty is irrelevant to our present purposes.) Brother Roberts printed the ecclesial news only, omitting the statement as to fellowship difficulties in Texas. The comments he added to the correspondence give his reason:

“The publication of your statement would only raise a controversy, which could not only do no good to any of us, but involve others in troubles *best localized*. We can afford to refer all doubtful matters to the tribunal of Christ, not doubtful, perhaps, to those who see clearly on the spot, but *doubtful to those at a distance*, who can only see them through the medium of conflicting representations” (“Fraternal Gathering”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 20, No. 233 — Nov. 1883 — p. 528).

If it appears that this position is at variance with Brother Roberts’ thoughts elsewhere given, I can only say that it is not my desire to portray anyone long deceased — especially one of the spiritual stature of Robert Roberts — as inconsistent. However, it should never be forgotten that no man, no matter how wise in the Bible, no matter how well respected for his work’s sake, no man (but Christ) has ever been perfect, or perfectly consistent.

A balanced view of Christadelphian history leads to startling, but understandable, conclusions: When controversies plagued large centers of Christadelphians — like Birmingham, London, or Adelaide — and touched brethren in editorial capacity, or otherwise well-known or influential, then those troubles were quickly exported to the most remote corners. But when a similar controversy arose in an isolated area, Texas for example, it was generally localized and ignored; thus it died out after a few unsettling years. There seems to be no more rational explanation as to why the “partial inspiration” question, for example, is still extant, but the “priesthood” question and other esoteric matters died well-deserved deaths. One is forced to the belief that the latter-day body of Christ would have been much better off had more such questions been localized, and ecclesias at a distance been allowed to concern themselves with their own affairs only.

“We must keep firmly to two rules, which might be considered by extremists to be contradictory, but which are complementary. All ecclesias as a basis of co-operation must acknowledge the same fundamental truths, while at the same time each ecclesia must have the right of judging any doubtful case. The first maintains the truth; the second provides for an ecclesia taking account of all the factors in any borderline case, these factors being only known to the members of that ecclesia. There must be mutual respect for each other’s judgments” (John Carter, “A House Divided”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 94, No. 1115 — May 1957 — p. 187).

“When fire breaks out there is need for calm, careful action. Panic is disastrous. Fanning of the flames is foolish. Spreading the fire to other places would be criminal. When controversy breaks out there is need for calm, careful thought, and all the facts of the fire drill have their spiritual counterpart. Our history as a community sadly illustrates the dangers of spreading controversy, and the evil of provoking controversy....

“Let us be on the Lord’s side to fight for unity, to put out fires of controversy, to rebuke those who would spread the fires afield. Together let us all pray that Christ may not be divided today” (H. Osborn, “Is Christ Divided?”, *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 102, No. 1211 — May 1965 — p. 214).

FINAL POINTS

46. The Ecclesial Guide

All ecclesias, and individuals, should have at hand a guide that, if it were read and observed, would go a long way toward solving many ecclesial problems. Unfortunately, A Guide to the Formation and Conduct of Christadelphian Ecclesias is more honored than used. It seems to be standard procedure for human nature to acknowledge the benefit of a principle in theory, but when provoked by circumstance, promptly to forget to implement that very principle that is most relevant. We all tend, under duress, to convince ourselves that rules are made for other people, and that the position in which we may suddenly find ourselves is very different from that which the framers of principles and rules envisioned. In theory, the wisdom of the words of Christ, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21), is unquestionable; but they are so easily set aside when we gaze in fond rapture upon a gleaming new automobile or a fine house or some

exquisite new fashions. The standard, “Turn the other cheek”, is wonderfully appropriate if your friend’s cheek is the one smitten, but we can always think of good reasons why we should retaliate.

In just such a way, The Ecclesial Guide supplies those balanced judgments that are most needed when in controversy they are most easily forgotten. Though no one would say the rules are perfect, as the Bible itself is, at the very least they are dispassionate commentaries on the relevant passages dealing with ecclesial conduct. They have the benefit of being sound advice from a bystander not personally involved at all in whatever conflict is immediately at hand. Principles have a way of becoming distorted and either over-stressed or under-stressed when the holders thereof come under intense pressure.

A few brief excerpts from the relevant sections should suffice here:

32. Cases of Sin and Withdrawal: “Withdrawal is a serious step, and ought not be lightly taken against any brother. It erects a barrier and inflicts a stain not easily removed. It ought never to be taken until all the resources of the Scriptural rule of procedure have been exhausted. The rule laid down by Christ for the treatment of personal offences (Matt. 18:15-17) is doubtless applicable to sin in general....”

39. Absence and Separate Meetings Unlawful: “It is....an imperative law that the brethren must be one body, and that they must submit one to another. It is a law of the house that each brother and sister must meet at the table of the Lord on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread. Nothing but denial of the truth in the assembly, or overt disobedience of the Lord’s commandments among them, can justify a brother or sister in absenting himself or herself from the breaking of bread.. If the matters of difference....do not affect the question of the truth or the commandments, it is the duty of the lesser to submit to the greater number... If, instead of submitting, they separate themselves, they put themselves in a false position from which worse things than those they objected to will come. Their action means that the greater number ought to submit to the lesser, or that there should never be submission to the wishes of others, and that a disappointed minority should always leave a meeting where their wishes cannot prevail. Such a doctrine is fraught with confusion and ruin, and is inconsistent with the most elementary commandments of Christ.”

40. A Time to Separate, and How to Go about it: “It is a maxim of universal law (divine included) that no man is to be judged without a hearing. If it is true of one man, it is true of a number of men, and to be applied as scrupulously to an erring ecclesia as to an individual delinquent. Suppose this rule is not acted on, — suppose the aggrieved minority simply depart, without formulating their grievances, and without giving the offending majority an opportunity of either justifying or removing the causes of offence, the situation is afterwards embarrassed for the minority as regards other ecclesias. Other ecclesias are in fellowship with the offending majority; and if there be not a correct mode of procedure, those other ecclesias, will not have it in their power to decide upon the issue.”

41. Involved in Another Ecclesia’s Trouble: This section is too lengthy to be quoted here in full, though it is all very good and very relevant. A point certainly worth stressing: any disfellowshipped brother or ecclesia is deserving of the right of appeal to someone, and there is no weakness implied in a conscientious, even drawn-out, examination of all matters pertaining to a disagreement.

42. Ecclesias in Relation one to Another: “The bond of union is the reception of the one faith, and submission to the commandments of the Lord. It is nothing less than a calamity when rupture on secondary issues sets in, where these other conditions of union exist....

“There ought to be no interference of one ecclesia with another....An ecclesia has no right to judge except for itself. This is the independence not to be interfered with: but a similar right to judge must be conceded to all, and the exercise of it, if tempered with a respectful and proper procedure, would never offend an enlightened body anywhere. In the majority of cases the withdrawal of one ecclesia is practically the withdrawal of all, since all will respect it till set aside, and since, in most cases, a concurrent investigation would lead to its ratification. But there may be cases where a reasonable doubt exists, and where a second ecclesia will come to a different conclusion from the first. What is to be done then? Are the two ecclesias that are agreed in the basis of fellowship to fall out because they are of a different judgment on a question of fact? This would be a lamentable result — a mistaken course every way. They have each exercised their prerogative of independent judgment: let each abide by its own decision, without interfering with each other. The one can fellowship a certain brother, the other cannot. Are they to aggravate the misery of a perhaps very trumpery and unworthy affair by refusing to recognize each other, because they differ in judgment about one person? What sadder spectacle can there be than to see servants of the Lord Jesus frowning at each other, and denying each other the comfort of mutual friendship and help, because

they cannot agree about a given action or speech or perhaps some unworthy person. The course of wisdom in such a case is certainly to agree to differ. An ecclesia acting otherwise — demanding of another ecclesia, as a condition of fellowship, that they shall endorse their decision in a case that has become the business of both — is in reality infringing that principle of ecclesial independence which they desire to have recognized in their own case. It would be to impose what might be an intolerable tyranny upon the brethren.”

47. Summary of Conclusions

What follows is a list, without elaboration, of some of the fellowship principles derived from the previous studies (references which follow certain items are to the most relevant chapter in this book):

1. Excommunication should always be intended to lead to the restoration of the sinner, the cessation of fellowship being thought of as only temporary.
2. It is at least as wrong to go too far in our demands upon our brethren, as it is not to go far enough. In other words, it is possible to err on the side of severity.
3. “Fellowship” appears many more times in the Bible as a positive thing, to be shared, than it does as a negative thing, to be withheld (Chapter 1).
4. Patience and sympathy, even toward error or ignorance, are always desirable; love is never a sign of weakness (Ch. 2).
5. False *teachers* and those who are falsely taught are two very different groups, and should not be treated the same (Ch. 2).
6. Even such brethren as the Lord’s own apostles could at times disagree in “fellowship” matters (2).
7. The “shepherd” who protects the flock must be our example, not the “hireling” who flees when danger threatens (3).
8. Our individual salvation is not endangered by fellowshiping “doubtful cases” (3).
9. A church without tares is an impossible thing in this dispensation; uprooting of “tares” or doubtful brethren can weaken the “good grain” (4).
10. The main purpose of the ecclesia is not to keep the Truth “pure” as a theory or system, but to help its members, impure men and women, strive *toward* Biblical purity or perfection (5).
11. Each ecclesia should be basically, if not altogether, concerned with its own affairs, i.e. building the “wall” in its own place (5).
12. Ecclesias are primarily responsible to Christ, and only secondarily to one another (6).
13. Inconsistencies in local fellowship matters must sometimes be tolerated (8).
14. Matthew 18, dealing with the procedure for possible disfellowship, has nothing whatsoever to say about taking up controversies with ecclesias other than one’s own (9).
15. We must seek reconciliation with our brethren continuously, and never be satisfied with disunion (10).
16. Much more emphasis is placed, Biblically, upon judging oneself than judging others (11).
17. “Peace” is always to be desired; division and strife, never (12).
18. “Fellowship” is primarily a way of life, not a technicality (13).
19. It is Christ’s utmost desire that his brethren be at one with each other (16).
20. Divisions are not always good nor admirable (17).
21. It is a common weakness of human nature, that those who are near to us but not quite with us arouse more bitterness than total strangers (21).
22. God knows who are truly His and He will reveal them in due time (22).
23. Sometimes the only proper course is to choose “the lesser of two evils”. God will pardon the failings of those who prepare their hearts to serve Him, even if their service is less than perfect (24).
24. The greatest abhorrence of sin is not necessarily to be found in the one who is most severe on the sinner (27).
25. Christ did not believe in “guilt — or defilement — by association”; in fact, he acted very much in opposition to such a theory (29).
26. “Negative holiness” can save no man (29).
27. Christ *died* for sinners, not for the sinless; moreover, he *lived* for sinners, bearing their burdens and patiently, lovingly helping them. He considered *all* men, even the most sinful, worth saving (30).
28. Perfect, or pure, fellowship with our brethren is an impossibility in this life (32).
29. Those who fail to excommunicate “heretics” do not thereby become “heretics” themselves (33).
30. In actual practice, brethren can agree to ignore minor differences and walk together if they are of one mind on the vital issues (35).
31. “Peaceableness” is a virtue always to be desired; it should not be kept “under wraps” until some imagined “purity” has first been achieved (36).
32. Differences of opinion on secondary matters are, if not ideal, at least preferable to out-and-out division (37).

33. A limited toleration of differences is more desirable than an absolute conformity of opinion that is dictatorially imposed (37).
34. Not all contention is proper or profitable; some contention may be only for one's own pride and personal opinion (39).
35. Mouths may be stopped by means other than the cutting off of heads (42).
36. Time and distance are often very real barriers to ascertaining all the facts necessary to make a proper decision regarding fellowship (45).
37. No brother should ever be judged without a fair hearing (46).
38. Two ecclesias may arrive at different conclusions on a matter involving fellowship, and yet agree to recognize each other in fellowship even while holding opposite opinions concerning a third party (46)

48. Dwelling Together in Unity (Psalm 133)

It seems fitting to conclude the consideration of "fellowship" with Psalm 133. Here is the perfect picture of unity — a *DIVINE UNITY*: the *sharing* of the blessings of God, poured out in love upon us *all*. How foolish to suppose that Biblical fellowship can be enjoyed by those who do not share the blessing of a common hope! But how foolish *also* to suppose that God views favorably any division among those who, despite minor differences, *do* share a common hope!

This psalm might well bear the title: "The *Descent* of Divine Blessings". The repetition of this word "descend" is obscured in the AV because, oddly enough, its three occurrences are translated three different ways: "ran down" and "went down" as well as "descended". But mark its uses here, and then we may follow the lovely refrain:

"Unity is like the precious ointment

that *DESCENDED* upon Aaron's beard;

Yea, that *DESCENDED* even to his skirts;

Even like the dew of mount Hermon

that *DESCENDED* upon Zion."

Through this refrain, as with the gently descending rains of summer, our Father seeks to cleanse our hearts of all pride and boasting. He seeks to refresh in our minds the principle that our unity is derived from above (descending from God), and is not the product of our own labors. Surely James had this in mind when he wrote of:

"the wisdom that is *from above*....pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy....and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (3:17,18).

"Can it be a question whether brethren should from conflict cease?" Truly unity — with God at the center — leads inevitably to righteousness, peace of mind, and the solution of those perplexing tangles in which Christ's brethren, as they execute their duties, so often find themselves.

"Behold how good and how *pleasant*...." It is not simply good (right and proper) that we dwell together in unity. It is also pleasant (exceedingly delightful) that we do so. The appeal of Abraham to his kinsman Lot might as well be an exhortation to us: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee... for *we be brethren*" (Gen. 13:8). It should be enough to encourage our endeavors in the direction of unity, if *only* it were right in God's sight. But the "icing on the cake" is that it is superlatively delightful as well. There is no state on earth to match this dwelling together in "the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) — with shared feelings and purposes — whether it be as husband and wife, or as an entire family, or in the larger "family" of the ecclesia.

The brethren of Christ "*dwell* together". This does not mean that they merely meet and socialize a little before and after ecclesial functions. This means instead a *continuing* together, in the closest communion. As David exhorted the men of Judah, "Ye are my brethren, ye are *my bones and my flesh*" (2 Sam. 19:12). And if other duties or infirmities or distances make this personal "dwelling together" impractical, then we still have recourse to thought and prayer for one another as a means of achieving this union.

The goal, the focal point of our unity, is mount Zion and her king. We could have no unity but for Christ and the promises. This Psalm 133 is one of the fifteen "Songs of Degrees". These glorious songs are centered in the worship of the Lord in

His temple, and are in part prophetic of the kingdom age (see the relevant chapters in G. Booker, *Psalms Studies*, Vol. 2). They are also called “Pilgrim Songs” and “Songs of Ascents” — because they appear to have been composed with those in mind who journey *upward* to worship the Lord of Hosts in the elevated mount Zion.

And so we find the expression of our unity in the *ascending* of our *common* petitions and the *descending* of our *common* blessings. True brethren of Christ are united in one hope, one need, and one experience. Unity with Christ is intimately bound up with unity with our brethren. We cannot have one without the other.

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

But when we exalt ourselves above our brethren then we do what our Lord and Savior would not do; we displease him; and we endanger our own oneness in the “Body of Christ”.

We must now examine the beautiful comparisons of this Divine unity: first, the holy anointing oil of Aaron (v. 2), with which the tabernacle and its furniture were also anointed (Exod. 30:23-33).

This anointing served as the consecration of God’s priests, empowering them to fulfill the duties of their office. All priests were anointed, but the high priest received a great abundance, an overflowing “to the skirts of his garments”. The anointing oil was an expression of God’s love in His ordinances: its “pouring out” prompts the “virgins” to love Him (Song of Songs 1:3). The anointing of Aaron pointed forward to that of Christ — “with the oil of gladness *above his fellows*” (Psa. 45:7). Christ has received a greater glory and a greater strength, so that he might be a perfect High Priest to us his brethren.

The “oil” descended first and in greater measure upon the head, Christ, and then descended to the skirts of his garments, his “Body” as well! God’s special provision of a Son in whom we might be reconciled to Him (2 Cor. 5:21) calls forth this picture of oil covering, not just the head, but the whole body! None of us is the head, only Christ. A realization of this simple fact would curtail most ecclesial wrangling and self-seeking. Our unity is that each of us is an integral part of the one, undivided “body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12). All of the body shares the blessings that came through the special anointing of the head. It is not the believers who make this unity possible, for Christ has already done so. Neither do we earn our place in “fellowship” around the table of the Lord. We merely accept it, and rejoice in the blessings it affords. Our righteousness is not our own, but his that called us. Our unity is based upon our abject humility and our sincere acceptance of our subordinate and dependent position.

Finally, in verse 3, we are called upon to consider the descending dew of Hermon as an allegory of our unity. The anointing oil has brought to our minds the death of Christ (“for in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my *burial*” — Matt. 26:12). Here, the dew stands foremost as a symbol of *resurrection* (his, and ours in prospect) — completing the cycle.

Hermon is a range of three peaks which dominates the northern parts of Israel, and which is visible over the entire Land. Because of its great height, Hermon is covered with snow most of the year. In late summer this snow begins to melt, the runoff feeding reservoirs and springs to supply water to the thirsty lands of the south.

The obvious and intended symbolism of Hermon is that of the Divine Blessing, stored up in the providence of God *until* the proper time, when it is most needed.

We can read verse 3 by omitting the phrase beginning with “and” which is in italics. Thus:

“As the dew of Hermon that descended upon the mountains of Zion...”

It is *the same dew* although the two areas are over 100 miles apart: Observers say that the breezes that blow from the north across the snow-covered face of Hermon bring cooling moisture as far south as Jerusalem. (Perhaps it is this very phenomenon which called forth the description of a faithful messenger — “as the cold of snow in the time of harvest”: Prov. 25:13.)

The dew comes as God’s blessing during the hottest part of the year. We are told the king’s favor is as dew upon the ground (Prov. 19:12), and especially upon the hallowed ground of Zion (Bible symbol of the unified body of saints: Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1). The “manna” of God — the bread of His blessing that descended each day — was said to come as the

dew falling upon the ground (Num. 11:9), emblem of the unfailing compassions of God for His people, renewed each morning (Lam. 3:22,23).

“For there [upon the mountains of Zion] the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”

Finally, and most important, the dew portrays the saints on the glorious resurrection morn:

“O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For thy dew is a dew of light” (Isa. 26:19, RSV)....

the first rays of the “Sun” revealing a glorious spectacle of reflected light, dancing upon the grass:

“From the womb of the morning like dew your youth will come to you” (Psa. 110:3, RSV).

In that greatest of all days the Lord will achieve that perfect unity of which our assemblies are only a shadow. A great multitude, which no man can number, born in a day, silently, irresistibly, as the dew of heaven. Such is the picture of the development of the body of Christ, a multiplicity and yet a *unity*, appearing all together for the first time.

In the memorials which we receive each Sunday we have the reason for our unity. We have the “bread which *strengtheneth* man’s heart” (Psa. 104:15) and the “wine that *maketh glad* the heart of man”. The strength and joy of a renewed life through Christ come from above. They descend upon us as the precious anointing oil, as the dew upon the earth beneath; and all we need do is stretch forth our hands and hearts to receive the eternal bounty of God’s inexhaustible store.

Let us draw together in this, the true unity of shared blessings. Let us look upon each of our brothers and sisters with deeper understanding. We are all of us, collectively and individually, those “for whom Christ died”. Let us be silent and reverent as we stand with our brethren and mingle our prayers like incense on the altar before the throne of heaven. We have come into the miraculous presence of God’s grace. It is His mercy alone that has brought each of us to share the oil of healing and the dew of refreshing, the bread of strengthening and the wine of joy. In the loving provision of His Son, the all-powerful, self-existent Lord of all being has commanded the blessing of life for evermore; and none can turn aside His decree.

May we grasp and cherish that bright hope, and lead lives worthy of the Savior who loved us all. May the contemplation of that awesome work, the reconciliation of sinners to God, transform our minds in the understanding and practice of true Biblical fellowship. And may we now — and forever — “dwell together in unity” under the shadow of His love.