

Apostolic Teaching
On
Fellowship and
Withdrawal

January, 1957

FORWARD

There is a spirit of enquiry abroad regarding the subject of fellowship. This interest is found in various parts of the brotherhood, and amongst brethren who may differ widely in their experiences. Some have known only a small "fellowship," formed at some time by brethren withdrawing from the main body and have gone out into a separated "fellowship," or perhaps into isolation- again others have experience of the main body and have gone out into a separated fellowship," or perhaps into isolation; again, others have been in a separated fellowship" and being dissatisfied have returned to the main body. In the main body there are those who are increasingly dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions and wonder what they ought to do. In the separated "fellowships- there are those who begin to wonder if the process of division and sub-division to procure purity of fellowship is after all correct. Such is a sample of the diversity of thought and circumstances all leading to an interest in the subject of fellowship.

In all this diversity, those who have the truth at heart must be concerned fundamentally about the same matters. Their concern is: How can we preserve the Truth amongst a community of believers? How ought we to deal with error? How should inter-ecclesial association be regulated? Especially, how can the spirit of the truth, and love, be caused to grow in an ecclesia? Any writing on fellowship must measure up to these questions. It is hoped that what is here presented does this, even if only in a general way. Remembering the diversity of outlook among those who may be readers, it does not seem possible to go beyond broad considerations in one writing. As the title indicates, this is no more than a careful examination of New Testament teaching, with sufficient application to make the principles clear. It is put forward for quiet study, leaving the reader to make practical application as he sees fit. Nothing more is intended.

The subject of fellowship does contain difficulties. There are difficulties peculiar to our times, and these are often not appreciated. The Bible especially the New Testament, is our guide, and our aim is to follow apostolic methods. This is right, but we ought to realise that in our age we are greatly handicapped and there can be no replica of apostolic arrangements. The welfare of an ecclesia depends largely on its teachers and leaders, and for us there is no Spirit guidance in their selection, nor have our leaders the help of the Spirit-gifts. In apostolic times the brethren composing the eldership of an ecclesia had been selected directly or indirectly, by an apostle, and the various Spirit-gifts they received made them an authoritative body specially equipped for teaching and controlling the affairs of the ecclesia. Our ecclesia organization and constitution has developed in the absence of this guiding wisdom: in fact our ecclesial constitution is a human effort to make good the deficiency of this "guiding wisdom". It is not copied from anything in scripture; it grew up gradually under the force of circumstances over twenty or thirty years. We ought not to be surprised, therefore, if mistakes have been made; and we ought not to frown upon the idea of re-examining the scriptures to see if all is well.

All we ask from the reader is a patient reading of the whole article, not limiting attention to one part, but endeavouring to fit together all the parts into a consistent whole. And if we venture to ask one thing more from the reader, it is that, having read the article once, he should read it a second time before forming any final conclusions.

Attention is drawn to a letter reproduced at the back of the booklet, written by Bro. Thomas on fellowship at the end of his life: also to the list of references to matters connected with fellowship in Eureka.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MANNER AND OCCASION OF APOSTOLIC WITHDRAWAL

In turning immediately to the subject of withdrawal, it has been assumed that the reader is acquainted with the general form of ecclesial life in the brotherhood, and also that there is acceptance of the idea that the ecclesia should be composed only of those who, having believed the Truth, have turned from their former life, and have put on Christ in baptism. By the Truth is meant the truth of the Bible as brought to light by Brother Thomas, outlined in such synopses of faith as the Birmingham Statement of Faith, and enlarged in the writings of Brother Thomas. These things are taken for granted in order to reduce the size of the book.

A number of other matters which might have been written at the beginning have been put aside after reflection. A consideration of some of the elements' of ecclesial life—the moulding influence of good and evil, the power of the Spirit- Word, the spirit of forbearance and love—would indeed be a suitable preparation of the mind; but this again would occupy space, and might confuse rather than enlighten. Recognizing that it is the Word of God that is the source of enlightenment and sanctification, it is felt that the wisest starting point is a precise examination of passages of scripture with which all are more or less familiar. The nature of fellowship, and the other more difficult matters find their place in later sections.

An Examination of New Testament Scripture On Withdrawal

There are some eight passages in the New Testament dealing with the matter of withdrawal and it will be desirable to examine each in turn, taking care to distinguish the special features of each case, noting also the type of men referred to and the nature of the withdrawal involved.

Matt. 18: 15-17. Moreover it thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone ... but if he neglect to hear the church let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

It must be remembered that the instructions in Matt. 18: 10-20 were addressed to the apostles. (See Mark 9: 35.) As the appointed overseers of the ecclesias, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit gifts, they were to act as shepherds of the -, sheep and not as lords over God's heritage. If any sinned against them, they were not free to act in any arbitrary way, as is usual with people in power, but rather they were to speak with the one concerned, then with a few more, and finally with the whole ecclesia, before they acted towards the offender as to a heathen man and a publican. Doubtless the same procedure would be required of all the brethren, as well as of the apostles, in a similar situation. Christ in his instructions enjoins the utmost forgiveness even "until seventy times seven" (verse 22) where the brother repents. But in verses 15-17 a case is contemplated where the offender will not repent; he is given three opportunities but refuses each time. He is thus totally lacking in the fruits of the spirit which brethren must cultivate, and remembering Christ's words "by their fruits ye shall know them" it is easy to see that such a man is deserving of the treatment Christ enjoins—"Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican:" as one estranged from God and from his brethren.

The attitude of the Jew to the Gentile is expressed by Peter in Acts 10:28, "Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation;" and by the criticism he afterwards received, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them."

Although these verses are dealing with sins against the apostles, in our application today it would seem proper and scriptural to follow the procedure Jesus lays down in all cases of error and wrongdoing.

Romans 16:17. Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

The apostle is here treating of men, who, for their own benefit and advancement ("serving: their own belly" v. 18) seek to lead a faction. They are men too high-minded to submit to apostolic teaching, and who "by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (v. 18) with the object of obtaining a

following. They are in the same class of those of whom Paul warned Titus—"For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers . . . teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Titus 1:10-11).- The danger was great in those days when it was the rule that those who preached the gospel should receive their living from the work. False teachers were thus tempted to usurp the position of the elders and bishops in order to obtain the living allotted to them. Where this temptation does not arise, as in our day, men may yet teach false things for reasons similar to "filthy lucre's sake." These will come into the same category. Christ's warning to "Beware of false teachers"(Matt. 7:15) applies to all such.

Titus 3:10. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject

"Heretic" is an untranslated Greek word and means one who forms or belongs to a breakaway party, action or schism. The basic Greek word is usually translated "sect," as "sect of the Pharisees," sect of the Sadducees" (Acts 5:17;15:5). The word involves a person's conduct, and the sin of heresy is included in Paul's list of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20-21). As Paul says to Titus (3:11), an heretic is "subverted" or "turned away" from the Truth. The word translated "reject" is also translated "refuse" (1 Tim. 5:11), "avoid" (2 Tim. 2:23). The passage under consideration is clearly parallel to Romans 16:17—"mark them which cause divisions, and avoid (ek-klino—"move away from") them." The same word "avoid" will fit both these cases. It is well to note also that this man—the heretic, factionist or sectarian—is established in his heresy, having been reproved on two previous occasions without effect; he thus comes into the same category as the unrepentant, self-willed man of Matt. 18, and is treated similarly.

1 Cor. 5 ;11-18. But now I have written unto you not to keep company if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them that are without? do ye not judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

This is the case of the man guilty of immorality. Paul, in this chapter, appears to give both general instructions for the treatment of such, and special instructions regarding this particular case. He is giving general instructions in verse 11; the brethren must have no company with any man called a brother *if* he is a fornicator, railer, drunkard, etc. All social intercourse must cease even to the extent of declining to eat with such. But the Corinthians had failed to carry out this treatment; instead they had gloried in this man and were puffed up. Paul calls a halt to this laxity and demands special treatment for the person concerned. He authorizes and exhorts the ecclesia to take immediate and drastic steps, saying, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

What did Paul mean by this "putting away" ("exairo" meaning "to expel")? It is clear that the brethren and sisters of Christ are not authorized physically to expel anyone from the meeting. The terse way in which Paul says "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" suggests that what is in mind has already been given in detail in earlier verses, and it probably refers to the instruction in verse 4 and 5, where they were told to use the power of the Holy Spirit and deliver the person to Satan. The meaning of this is dealt with in the next section.

Hence there is a general instruction as stated in v. 11, calling for a course of action to be adopted by the brethren which would result in the offender going away himself. They were to have no company with such a man: they were not to eat with him, nor would they welcome him to their table at the Love feast. (It must always be remembered that in apostolic times the breaking of bread was part of a fraternal meal—Jude v. 12). Distinct from this, there is the special treatment, arising from the special conditions prevailing in the ecclesia as Corinth, requiring a "putting away" of the person involving "delivering him to Satan."

1 Tim. 1:20. Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

It is sometimes argued that Paul's "delivering to Satan" means that he delivered them over to the outside world, and the inference is drawn that we should do likewise with defaulters from the doctrine of Christ. But in 1 Cor. 5 where similar language is used in regard to the treatment of the fornicator, it is evident that

the power of the spirit was necessary to carry out the action of delivering to" Satan. Verse 4 of that chapter reads—"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one to Satan."

Such a case of delivering to Satan may be found in Elymas the sorcerer being struck blind by Paul (Acts 13:11). See also Luke 13:16—"whom Satan hath bound," and Paul's own "messenger of Satan" to buffet him (2 Cor. 12:7). It seems evident that "delivering to Satan" means the infliction of some disease or physical infirmity. (See *Elpis Israel* page 100, 11th and 14th editions). Not having the power of the Spirit, it is evident we cannot carry out the same treatment.

The emphasis in the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander must be placed on their blasphemy, and this is the reason Paul delivered them to Satan. To blaspheme is to defame or speak evil of. The sense of the word may be gathered from the following reference: Mark 22:7, Col. 3:8, 1 Tim. 1:13, Acts 13:45. In this case their blasphemy included denying the resurrection (2 Tim. 2:18); but let us remember there were some in the ecclesia at Corinth who were inclined to the same view (1 Cor. 15:12) and Paul does not say anything about withdrawing from them, nor does he deliver them to Satan. Clearly Paul makes a difference; those in Corinth were not blasphemers as Hymenaeus and Alexander, and this fact marks them off for different treatment. The Corinthians were in need of careful instruction and patience, not a cutting-off from the sanctifying influence of faithful men.

1 Tim. 6:5. Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

The type of man the apostle is here dealing with is important. The chapter opens with the duties of masters and servants, and the obedience which servants should render. But some were teaching contrary things and Paul exposes their evil character—"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but dotting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings" etc. Such is the type of man to be withdrawn from—one advocating unrighteous conduct, proud, refusing to accept the authority and teaching of Christ and the apostles.

2 John 10:11. It 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.

It is clear that the Apostle John is here referring to those that "went out" from an ecclesia, for he says in v. 7 "Many deceivers are gone forth into the world" (RV). This links up with the 1st epistle, chapter 4:1—"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." This again directly links up with chapter 2:19—"They went out from us, but they were not of us." So it is evident that those who were not to be received into the "house" were those anti-christs who had departed from apostolic ecclesias; they had "left the truth;" they "had not God" (2 John 19) and were teaching another Jesus who could not save.

Similar false teachers are referred to by Paul as "dogs" (Phil. 3:2) and by Christ as "wolves," "Nicolaitanes" and "Balaamites" (Matt. 7:15; Rev. 2:6 and 14). Such men, who by their teaching, destroy the principles of salvation, must be treated in the same way.

2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15. Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye 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. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

This is the case of disorderly walk; a characteristic which we are not left to define for ourselves but which the apostle defines for us in the same chapter. He says "for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;" and continues later "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." It is plain that the disorderly walk of which Paul is speaking is in not working for one's living, but depending on the charity of the brethren. It will be found that the "tradition" (singular)

to which he refers in verse 6 is this very principle of working for one's living; for on turning back to the first epistle we find he establishes this tradition (i.e. teaching) In the words—"And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly towards them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing." (1 Thess. 4:11-12. The seriousness of refusing to work is expressed by Paul In his letter to Timothy: "If any provide not for his own and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than the unbeliever. (1 Tim. 5:8).

In this case of offence in the ecclesia at Thessalonica, Paul seems to give special attention to the matter of withdrawal and it would seem that a less severe attitude was intended than in other cases. This is dealt with more fully later on.

When applying Paul's instructions today, we ought to be careful as to what we take as "disorderly walk." We should apply the words only to things of a similar character to busyboding and idling.

Conclusions

Having examined these passages on withdrawal we find three features are important. First, that those to be subject to withdrawal were men manifesting an evil character; their failure was more than a failure of understanding, it extended to unrighteous actions or revealed an unrighteous state of mind. They were:

1. Those who committed trespasses against brethren and refused to repent.
2. Those who sought to lead factions, and those who obstinately preferred factions, in opposition to apostolic teaching.
3. Those whose behaviour was immoral, involving fornication, drunkenness, reviling, etc.
4. Blasphemers, anti-christs, and similar destroyers of the faith.
5. Busybodies who would not work for their living.

It is evident therefore that cases for withdrawal in apostolic ecclesias would be comparatively infrequent, seeing they were confined to individuals in these categories; and we see from the treatment enjoined by Christ in the matter of personal offence—"as a heathen man and a publican"—that such are outside the hope of the Kingdom unless they repent, where this is possible. In passing, the contrast ought to be made with the present-day view that many of those with-drawn from or in other "fellowships" are still in Christ and may be in the Kingdom in spite of their errors.

The second feature to be noted is that in the rare occasion where withdrawal is necessary the apostle calls for a literal and personal avoiding of the person. Individual action was necessary—"let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican," "from such withdraw thyself," "have no company with," etc. The usual method practised today is to pass a resolution of withdrawal and exclude the wrongdoer from breaking bread, but the brethren often still have company with the person at other times and maintain friendly relations with him. This procedure clearly does not go far enough and is not in accordance with the scriptural instructions. The adopting of the attitude of "having no company with" the person would only take place after the steps given in Matt. 18: 15-17 had been carried out. And this attitude would be adopted, not with bitterness or rudeness, but sadly and in meekness. Nor would such an attitude forget those proper Christian courtesies that arise in our chance meeting with anyone in the world.

Regarding the withdrawing, it will be observed that in different cases different phrases are used which seem to indicate different degrees of withdrawal. "Withdraw thyself" in 1 Tim. 6:5 means a clear separation, depart from the person. (See the use of the same Greek word in Acts 15:38). In 2 Thess. 3:6 a different word is used for "withdraw yourselves," meaning not to associate with. In this case in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul goes into greater detail, and adds later "have no company with him;" yet qualifies this with "count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Here is a lesser degree of withdrawal than in other cases. They were to keep away from him in his idleness and busy-boding, but they were still to treat him as a brother and admonish him. They were not to treat him as "a heathen man and a publican." This would be because the wrongdoing was not so heinous. In another case, in 1 Cor. 5:11, Paul uses the same phrase as a 2 Thess. 3:6 "have no company with," but here he qualifies it in an opposite direction. His qualification indicates a very complete withdrawal, "No, not so much as to eat."

This was the attitude towards a fornicator, a drunkard, or a reviler.

The third matter to comment on is that the attitude of having no company with the wrong-doer would be intended to have the effect of making him to go away from the meeting. One of two things would follow from the brethren deciding to withdraw from a person; he might repent, or he would go out from the meeting: clearly he would not stay where no company was offered him and where he was regarded as estranged from God and from the brethren ("as a heathen man and a publican"). Even the lesser step of "withdrawing fellowship" as practiced today has this effect. It is well to remember the obvious fact that no brother, or ecclesia, has authority over another. It is the person himself that must decide to leave the meeting.

The Apostle John refers to evil men going out from the ecclesia of their own volition: "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" (1 John 2: 19). This going out would be the result of the brethren's opposition to these false teachers and their teaching. As John says later, they overcame them: "Ye are of God, little children; } "and have overcome them; because greater is he that is In you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Bro. John Thomas remarks: "All whom the apostles fellowshipped believed it"—the true doctrine of the nature of Christ—"and all in the apostolic ecclesias who believed it not, and there were such, had no fellowship with the apostles, but opposed their teachings, and when they could not have their own way, John says 'they went out from us, but they, the antichrists, were not of us, for if they had been of us (of our fellowship) they would have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us' (1 John 2:19). The apostles did not cast them out, but they went out of their own accord, not being able to endure sound doctrine."—Christadelphian 1870, page 16. (See complete article at the end of this booklet).

Paul writes similarly, regarding the Judaistic teachers who had bewitched the brethren in Galatia: "I would than they which unsettle you would even cut themselves off" (Gal. 5:12 R.V.)-

From these several considerations it is evident that the proper course for the friends of Christ was earnest contention for the truth together with the avoiding or having no company with the wrongdoer. This procedure, if it had been diligently followed in the first century would have preserved health in the ecclesias and kept apostacy at bay.

CHAPTER TWO

ERROR IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES

A Consideration of the Epistles

The Epistle of James concludes with the words: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." Error, whether in the individual or as leaven in a community, leads to death; truth, understood and obeyed, is purifying and leads to life. Hence the need, the paramount need, to set forth continually the whole truth of God in the ecclesia and to expose that which is erroneous. This is love towards brethren and duty towards God.

The Apostle Paul is the great example of this carefulness in maintaining God's truth, in doctrine and precept. He is quick to oppose the Judaisers, false brethren unawares brought in; he writes regarding them, "to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal. 2:5). He reasons powerfully with the Galatian brethren, who had been "bewitched" by them. He handles many troubles and errors in the Corinthian ecclesia, patiently instructing and exhorting, yet he is not content with this, for he concludes his second epistle with these words: "For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found of you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, strifes, back-bitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults . . . and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare . . . examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:2-5.),

The Epistles of Paul and the other inspired writers give us an insight into the condition of the apostolic ecclesias. Most of the epistles were written to combat wrong ideas amongst the brethren. Wrong ideas existed regarding circumcision, justification by works, resurrection, the nature of Christ, philosophy and false science leading to immortal soulism, fellowship with idols, worship of angels, going to law, service to masters etc. Bro. Thomas writes instructively on these things in Eureka Vol. 1—see references at the end. Against these errors Paul and his fellow-apostles battled unceasingly, as shown in the epistles, using sound reasoning, pointed rebuke, and balancing encouragement. For Paul there was no peace with error.

In dealing with error Paul makes a difference between the teachers of wrong doctrines and those deceived or beguiled by these teachers. The false prophets he seeks to dislodge from the ecclesia, instructing the brethren to shun them as evil men as we have seen in chapter one. But those who have allowed themselves to be ensnared with wrong ideas he reasons with and does not propose that they should be withdrawn from. This differentiation is very clear in Paul's letter to the Galatians. They had given heed to the Judaisers: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. 3:1). Again, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel" (ch. 1:6). These verses show the extent to which many of them had erred from the truth; but Paul labours to re-convert them to the gospel of Christ; "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you" (ch. 4:19). There is no suggestion of withdrawing from them; they are still "my little children." But of those who were promoting the false teaching, Paul speaks very differently; "If any man preach any other gospel let him be accursed" (1:9); "he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment" (5:10); "I would they were cut off which trouble you" (5:12).

An equally serious error was abroad in the Corinthian ecclesia, "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" All are acquainted with Paul's masterly argument against this idea, and his pointed rebuke, "Awake to righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). Such is Paul's handling of error, but he does not withdraw himself from them. Contrast this with his treatment of Hymenaeus and Alexander who were evil teachers of this false idea, and also with his demand for drastic action by the ecclesia in a matter of immorality (1 Cor. 5:5).

These illustrations lead us to a general principle in the apostolic handling of error; namely, that where there was some departure from the faith, withdrawal did not immediately follow. Rather sound reasoning was

brought to bear. As Paul says, the scriptures are "Mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4). Under the influence of such reasoning the one in error would move toward or further away from the truth, and it would become manifest what spirit he was of. So that he would either be restored to the way of truth or he would bring himself into one of those classes of persons considered in chapter one—blasphemers, anti-Christ, proud and rebellious spirits etc—from whom the brethren must withdraw themselves. In a rare case there might be from the start a plain denial of the faith, such that it could be said, as 2 John verse 9: "He hath not God." Also in some cases a wrong spirit might be manifest in the errorist from the start.

It is clear that in the apostolic handling of error, and those in error, the matter was not narrowed down to the rule that withdrawal should take place where there was a failure to endorse a statement of faith: action against a person was based on broader grounds than this, and there was a consideration of the state of mind of the person, the motive and objects connected with the error. We have seen this already in studying the passage on withdrawal in chapter one. The false teachers of Rom. 16:17 "serve their own belly." The man who consents not to wholesome words (1 Tim. 6:3) "is proud, knowing nothing." The Judaisers were actuated by the fear of persecution, "As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised: only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (Gal. 6:12). Those who did not confess that Jesus had come in the flesh were deceivers and antichrists. (2 John verse 7). Again, both Christ and John give instruction on discerning error, and they stress the state of mind of the errorist. Christ, warning his disciples of false teachers (Matt. 7:15) tells them "Do men gather grapes or thorns, or figs or thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" . . . "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." The Apostle John lays down the same rule: "They"—the false teachers—"are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." (1 John 4:5-6)

If we in our day are contemplating withdrawal in a case of wrong belief, we should be careful to see that the case is comparable with these scriptural illustrations. To regard the Statement of Faith as a sufficient rule of action is an incomplete approach. In the rare case where there is a plain denial of the faith, withdrawal is unavoidable. But it is certain that no one would go so far from the Faith without manifesting a wrong state of mind towards divine things.

In the picture we have of the apostolic ecclesias we see then the existence of various errors and seductions from the way of right—and such are necessary for the proving of the saints (1 Cor. 11:19)—we see the diligent opposition of the apostles, with patience towards the deceived, and rejection only of false teachers and those who have turned from the way of salvation and the fear of God. It is clear that the ecclesias even under the apostles had no appearance of perfection. They were a training ground for the saints, a mixture of good, bad and indifferent. The Apostle Paul truly exhorted to oneness of mind and peace, yet because of the weakness of human nature there was a continual warfare. Such conditions had the effect of developing in the faithful a robustness in the truth of God, and a spirit of patience towards failure that was not wilful. Paul in his final letter to Timothy—and to us—when he "is ready to be offered" stresses what is important: "I charge thee therefore . . . preach the word (to the brethren); be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:1-2). "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Tim. 2:24-6). This advice of Paul should be earnestly heeded today.

A Consideration of the Seven Letters

The epistles were written to ecclesias in the time of their first love. By the time the seven letters were communicated through John, the churches in Asia were in various stages of declension. Pergamos is rebuked for having those that held the doctrines of the Balaamites and Nikolaitanes; Thyatira is censured for suffering "that woman Jezebel" to teach and seduce. These ecclesias had failed to deal with the false teachers in the apostolic manner. They should have contended against them, opposed their teaching and so

have overcome them. But a spirit of toleration prevailed and their false ideas were disseminated in the ecclesias. Had these men been treated as the apostles enjoined, the situation which Christ deplored would not have arisen; the false teachers would have "gone out" long before.

These changed conditions merit further study. Another principle—and extension of apostolic teaching—stands out: that in spite of the serious condition of these ecclesias, Christ does not call upon the faithful to separate themselves from the meeting. The elders truly had failed in not driving out the false teachers, but the faithful brethren were not to separate because of that failure. Bro. Thomas, in dealing with this situation, shows that the faithful remained, and were the "little strength" "the few names which had not defiled their garments" etc. (see the references to these expositions at end). Thus we find Christ saying to the faithful in Thyatira—"But unto you I say, and unto the rest 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." This shows that in spite of the failure of the ecclesia to remove the false teachers, Christ does not call upon the faithful to separate from the meeting. The righteous are not condemned with the guilty but emphasis is laid upon the individual's own standing before God, in the exhortation which follows: "But that which ye have already hold fast till I come."

Furthermore, Christ says He will do the separating, "Behold, I will cast her (Jezebel) into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death" (Rev. 2: 22-23.).

Peter and Jude speak similarly to this when showing how false teachers would come into the ecclesias and be spots in their love feasts. They do not speak of separation from the meeting because of this, but rather they call for earnest contending for the faith (Jude verse 3). They emphasize, like Christ, the importance of individual steadfastness—"But ye beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy, of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20-21). The effect of the earnest contention called for would doubtless be seen in the departure of the evil ones, for Jude had just been saying that the mockers who walk after their own ungodly lusts are those who separate themselves (verse 19).

The letter to Sardis also shows the same fact that the true and false existed together in the same ecclesia, and that the faithful were by earnest contention to strengthen the things that remained, rather than to separate themselves from the assembly.

These illustrations all show that even if the ecclesia is failing in its duty, the faithful are to remain, and not to withdraw themselves from the whole assembly. This harmonizes with our finding in the preceding section, and in chapter one, that it is appropriate to withdraw only from those who are unrighteous men and have turned from the fear of God.

The Lesson Regarding Fellowship

The question will be asked: "But is it not defiling to stay in the same ecclesia as the unfaithful?" The words of Christ to Sardis give an answer to this question.

This church had a name that it lived but in reality it was dead (Rev. 8:1). Nevertheless there were "a few names even in Sardis which had not defiled their garments," Thus in this dead and defiled ecclesia there were a few undefiled. Do we realize the force of this? It means that the few faithful brethren were not defiled by being in the same ecclesia as the unfaithful; and that though breaking bread in the same assembly no contamination had passed to them; they were not implicated in the evil of others. This is an important and striking passage and crystal clear in its meaning. It cuts at the root of the idea that we must be contaminated by the presence in the ecclesia of unfaithful brethren.

Several objections, however, have been raised to this interpretation.

First—That there was no doctrinal error in Sardis.

Second—That the faithful could not have known the condition of the ecclesia.

Third—That the faults of the ecclesia were not sufficient to warrant withdrawal.

Fourth—That the faithful were a separate community.

All these "explanations" have been given, but they all fail when put to the test.

In regard to the **first** objection, it is quite true that no doctrinal error is mentioned, but v. 3 shows that defilement was connected with things "received and heard"—which surely are doctrine. Bro. Thomas viewed the defilement as doctrinal; he says—"Heretical opinions subversive of the faith had crept in. Though the particular heresies are not specified as in former epistles, whatever they were they were of a nature to defile. This appears from the fact that they who "kept strictly" what they had originally "received and heard," had "preserved their garments from defilement" (Eureka 1, 353). The use of the word "defile" is quite appropriate to departure from doctrine. The Greek word is used in only one other place in the Revelation, and its usage there is definitely- in connection with doctrine. It is Rev. 14:4—"These are they which were not defiled with women." The women referred to are the Roman harlot and her' daughters, of which Jezebel (Rev. 2:20) was the prototype; and defilement is caused by imbibing the false ideas of these spiritual harlots. Thus it is more than probable that the defilement and death of the Sardians was brought about by close contact with that same "woman Jezebel" who was "suffered" in Thyatira.

Regarding the **second** objection that the faithful could not have known the condition of the ecclesia. This is an entirely unwarranted assumption and will not bear the light of reason. It might be true that in certain individual cases a faithful brother could not discern whether another brother was "dead" or "alive," but to assert that these few in Sardis could regularly assemble in the same place as "defiled" persons, listen to their conversation and observe their walk and not be fully aware of their true condition, is not logical. The message itself shows that the sins were discernible, for Christ calls upon them to "strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die." If it were not obvious that "things" remained and what "things" were already dead, how could they obey this injunction? For how would they discern what things were in need of strengthening?

The **third** objection, that the faults of the ecclesia were not sufficient to warrant withdrawal, fails because it does not properly assess the seriousness of the defilement, which brought spiritual death to those who were defiled. Now Christ does not call upon the faithful to strengthen these dead ones—they were apparently too far gone—but to exert themselves on behalf of the "dying;" they were to strengthen the things that remained that were ready to die. One translation renders this "establish the rest who were about to be dying," indicating that persons were meant by the "things that remained." Furthermore, in verse 4 Christ says the faithful will walk with him in white, for "they are worthy," implying that the others, the dead and defiled, were unworthy and had committed sins which would exclude from the Kingdom. The faults of many in the ecclesia were therefore of a serious character, yet Christ does not expect the "undefiled" to separate from the assembly.

The **fourth** objection does not meet the requirements of the case, for there were not two lightstands in Sardis, but one; and one "Angel" of the church only is addressed, and is held accountable for the condition in the ecclesia,

These objections all overlook essential features in the case, and do not explain why Christ said the few were undefiled. If the objections were correct, He ought to have said just the opposite! He should have told them what they were ignorant of that they were defiled and contaminated by their contacts with the unfaithful, and Involved in the guilt of others; and should have warned them to flee from the guilty ecclesia in order to cleanse themselves.

We do not suppose that these who had clean garments simply stayed in the ecclesia and did nothing to correct the errors or the laxity, for in that case they would be implicated in the sins of others, and would have been rebuked by Christ like those of Thyatira who "suffered" that woman Jezebel. No, they kept their own garments clean by doing their utmost to correct the wayward ecclesia whilst remaining in it. They had a very real task to perform, to join with the angel of the ecclesia in strengthening the things which remained.

We conclude then that the defilement was doctrinal, many had sullied their garments by contact with false ideas; the sins were apparent and well known to the faithful; they were serious and of a nature to exclude from the Kingdom. Yet, in spite of all this, the faithful remained personally undefiled and uncontaminated. Thus the conclusion is established that contamination does not pass automatically from one to another in the same assembly; this can only be so if there is personal sympathy with the guilty. "He that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 11).

CHAPTER THREE

FELLOWSHIP AND THE BREAKING OF BREAD

The analysis in chapter two of the situation in Sardis leads inevitably to the conclusion that the act of breaking bread in remembrance of Christ does not necessarily constitute fellowship or oneness with all the persons who have assembled together. Let us now consider further this aspect of the matter.

Brethren are said to be "in-fellowship" or "not in-fellowship." These phrases belong to the idea that brethren in different parts of the country are linked 'together upon a particular basis, and every individual in this bond or "fellowship" is able to visit or break bread at any ecclesia in the "fellowship." Thus we have the "Temperance Hall Fellowship," the "Suffolk St. Fellowship," the "Berean Fellowship" etc. This idea of fellowship is quite foreign to scripture and no such counterpart is found in apostolic times although error was often in evidence, as we have seen. It is worthy of note that Christ, in writing to the seven churches did not view them in their relation one to the other, but as separate individuals bodies, each with different qualities and different errors; yet none of them was held responsible for the sins of the others.

True Fellowship.

The principles involved in fellowship are thus defined by John—"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. . . But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (1 John 1.3-7).

This passage is very comprehensive and shows the essential basis of fellowship. It is well to note that the apostle does not introduce the breaking of bread into his argument but shows fellowship to be dependent on true knowledge and walking in the light—"That which we (the apostles) have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." Fellowship, then, was dependent on knowledge being imparted to the hearer or reader by the apostles. Upon receiving that knowledge and being rightly actuated by it, the hearer or reader placed himself in the apostles' fellowship and thus in fellowship with the Father, because "our (the apostles') fellowship is with the Father," as John says.

Thus was set up an Apostolic Fellowship, as we read in Acts 2:42—"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking bread, and in prayers".

No other human fellowship in the truth has been set forth from that day to this. We in our day are not authorized to create human fellowships, as unhappily, has been done. Rather must we aim to place ourselves, like the believers of the first century, in the fellowship of the apostles, by a correct knowledge and walk. This was the view of Bro. John Thomas. When asked concerning certain controversial matters, "Would you have any fellowship with those who believe or teach such things?" he did not make a direct answer, but expressed what was his concern by the reply, "My fellowship is with the apostles, they had many brethren who were bewitched and disgraced the truth" (Christadelphian 1870, p. 155).

It is apparent that the essential idea in fellowship is the sympathy existing between two persons, arising from common beliefs, hopes and desires. In a phrase, the two are in love with the same things. This sympathy is perceived with no uncertainty by a true believer. By experience it is sometimes found that fellowship exists between two who are separated by divisions or, on the other hand, it is found that two in the same meeting or "fellowship" have no real affinity or fellowship, though both nominally subscribe to the written basis of the "fellowship." Thus fellowship properly is a relationship between two individuals, their oneness of mind establishing the bond of fellowship.

We begin, then, so see that fellowship in the Truth is not necessarily denoted by a body of people in various towns who will, as the phrase is, "break bread with each other." Fellowship may exist despite human barriers set up by world-wide divisions. Fellowship is primarily individual in its extent and responsibilities, and cannot be arranged by the decisions of others, made, perhaps, many years ago. Where two love the Truth and seek with all their heart to attain to the fellowship of the apostles, then fellowship will exist between them. Such fellowship cannot be broken, nor is it destroyed because "out-of-fellowship" rules

would prevent these two breaking bread together.

The Breaking of Bread In Relation to Fellowship

The breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ may or may not be an "expression of fellowship. Where true fellowship already exists, then those partaking of the emblems find in the act an expression of their fellowship but this aspect is always secondary to the main object of remembering Christ. The presence of merely nominal brethren at the same table does not affect the fellowship already existing between the faithful, neither will it affect their fellowship with God. No fellowship exists between the faithful and the unfaithful, and the act of breaking the bread cannot alter that fact; it does not automatically make the faithful responsible for another's sins. This will only be so if they support the brother in his error. If they have faithfully done their duty towards him they are not defiled by his presence, as we have seen in regard to Sardis.

It has been thought that 1 Cor. 10:16-17 conflicts with this presentation of the breaking of bread. Let us see. The verses read, "the cup of blessing which we bless is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

Who are the "we all" who are the one bread, the one body? Paul can only be thinking of the all who are truly "in Christ." This may be more readily appreciated by looking at the same phrase later in this letter. Paul writes: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," 1 Cor. 15:51. Now, not everyone in Corinth, or elsewhere, will be approved at the judgment seat, and we have to understand the "we all" here as only those who are faithful. So it is in chapter 10. Paul is not thinking of all assembled together at Corinth, but the "all" who are partakers of the One Body." In the very next chapter Paul refers to some in Corinth who ate the bread, but were not partakers of the One Body. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body," For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Thus it is clear that Paul did not believe that breaking bread in the same assembly created fellowship with all.

So we have the situation that Paul knew of various errors in Corinth, yet he says: "We being many are one bread, One Body." These words apply to "the many" who partake of the emblems worthily. If any partakes unworthily, he is not of the One Body; he eats and drinks to his own condemnation. This verse, therefore, does not conflict with what we have written, but in fact, supports it.

Before leaving this passage in 1 Cor. 10, it may be profitable to look at the context of the verse, as well as the verse itself. Paul is speaking about idolatry. He says in verse 14 "flee idolatry," and in verse 21 concludes "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils." So then in the verse we have been examining, Paul is not contemplating so much the union of those partaking of the body and blood of Christ, as the incompatibility of partaking of the body and blood of Christ, with the partaking of idol sacrifices by the brethren. He strengthens his argument by referring to Mosaic things: "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (v.18). There is nothing in the Israelites' offering of sacrifices to suggest fellowship one with another, but only of fellowship and atonement with God. Paul's point is that in offering the sacrifice they become "partakers" of the atonement made possible by that God-provided altar. By this parallel Paul shows how inconsistent it was to share in the altar of Christ—symbolized by the bread and the wine—and at the same time to share in sacrifice to idols. There is nothing to suggest that we must scrutinize others to see if they are fit to offer at the same "altar;" but, as Paul says elsewhere in this epistle, rather must we examine ourselves.

As we have pointed out earlier, Paul's personal attitude should instruct us. Although he was aware of errors in Corinth, he did not refuse to associate with them. On the contrary he makes efforts to visit them, and correct the erroneous beliefs, and nowhere does he suggest that the faithful should separate from the meeting.

The Place of the Breaking of Bread In a Case of Withdrawal.

Withdrawal is usually understood in terms of an ecclesial resolution collectively "withdrawing fellowship" from a person, which in practice means that he is disallowed a participation in the breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ. This gives an incorrect emphasis on the breaking of bread-in the matter of withdrawal. There are no grounds for singling out and attaching such importance to this act. It is surely significant that not one of the withdrawal passages mentions the breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ. One passage (1 Cor. 5:11) speaks of not eating with the offender, but this refers primarily to eating and drinking as a social act, and would include the breaking of bread only as a part of the whole process of avoiding. Withdrawal, as we have already seen, is the drawing back of the brethren from the guilty person. The drawing back is a mental and actual attitude towards the person, otherwise described as "having no company with him," and this requires each individual personally to withdraw himself from the person. This is the essential idea that we ought to follow out. The unfitness of the person to remember Christ is not the primary point in a withdrawal.

In apostolic times, this "having no company with," had a clear and personal application at the weekly love feast. On this occasion the brethren would express their attitude towards the person by not receiving him at their table. He would find no company at any of the tables, and this would result in his immediate departure. We have no direct counterpart to this feast, but this does not mean that the same result may not be obtained. After collective consideration of the case, the offender would be told that he was not welcome at the meetings, and the brethren would be exhorted to have no company with him. If this was carried out faithfully in the meeting and elsewhere, the offender—his fleshly mind annoyed by such treatment—would absent himself. Clearly he would not stay where no company was offered him; even a proud and obstinate man being once or twice repelled in this way by the brethren would depart. In our meetings for the breaking of bread, the personal act of handing the bread to the offender is not compatible with having no company with him, and if this was the mind of the brethren generally, declining to hand the emblems would be regarded as the counterpart to not eating with the person in the love feast in apostolic times.

If the one being avoided should repent—as occurred with the fornicator at Corinth—the spirit of love and forgiveness enjoined by Paul on that occasion, 2 Cor. 2:7, ought to be readily extended. Likewise when avoiding is necessary, this must be done in a spirit of meekness and sorrow.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE APPLICATION OF APOSTOLIC FELLOWSHIP TO THE PRESENT DAY

General Considerations

We believe the foregoing chapters give a true analysis of the doctrine of fellowship and withdrawal as taught and practiced by the Apostles. It is the aim of this chapter to show how we can follow this system in the altered conditions pertaining to the latter-day revival of the Truth.

It is evident we have not given sufficient thought to the scripture teaching on withdrawal; withdrawal has been applied in wrong cases and also wrong procedure has been followed.

The cases for withdrawal, are, as we have seen, strictly limited and thus will involve only a few, forming a striking contrast with present practice. The withdrawal passages cannot justly be used to support separation from a whole ecclesia; still less from whole groups of ecclesias. In any instance there may be only one or two actual offenders in the apostolic sense, yet when a Division is forced throughout the country there is separation from hundreds who are certainly not offenders. The majority of these are quite sound and opposed to the error in question, but as a matter of principle refuse to be involved in matters that are not their concern locally. As to those in the actual ecclesia where the "trouble" arises, some do maintain opposition to the error, others fail to arrive at any decision in the matter, whilst others perceive the bearing of the matter but are not zealous enough in dealing with the offender. None of these positions provides an apostolic reason for withdrawal, and there is no scriptural licence for raising "fellowship" barriers against such brethren.

A still greater evil than this mass withdrawal is the practice of making divisions over matters which ought not to involve any withdrawal according to apostolic teaching.

Many brethren who consider that country-wide divisions have been inevitable deplore the fact that they involve separation not only from the evil-doer himself but from hundreds of others who are not willing to "take action." It is freely admitted that many are quite unable to come to a decision about the intricate matters which have caused some divisions and brethren often admit that members of other "fellowships" will be in the kingdom; yet, by maintaining separation from them they virtually put them all into the category of those evil men to whom the withdrawal passages apply—men who, unless they repent, cannot inherit the kingdom.

Our failure to carry out the apostolic commands is further evident when we consider the manner of withdrawal. The apostle calls for a literal avoiding of the person; or, in the words of Christ, a treating as "a heathen man and a publican." The fact that we often do not feel able to treat brethren in other "fellowships" in this way, surely indicates we are trying to apply the doctrine of withdrawal to the wrong cases. We also see that individual action is called for—a withdrawal of self from the offender's company. Contrast this with our present practice which seeks to do by resolutions of "disfellowship" what the apostles require vigilant brethren to carry out personally.

We see then that the confused condition of the brotherhood is largely the result of our instituting methods and systems of fellowship which are not scriptural. Brethren have doubtless acted in all good faith and have pursued the only course which seemed practicable to them. The difficulty has been in adapting the withdrawal commandments to conditions differing from those in the apostles' days. We lack many things which the early churches enjoyed. We have no apostles with authoritative voice, no elders with spirit gifts for the discerning of false teaching and the guidance of the ecclesia; we cannot afflict offenders with physical punishment as Paul could. But because we lack these things should we introduce a system which is not in harmony with the scriptures? Ought we not rather to get as near as we can to the apostolic method in spite of our lack of spirit-appointed bishops and elders? The fact that we are given no other instructions for the control and running of ecclesias than those we have considered, shows that we ought to follow them as closely as we can.

Substantially we can follow apostolic methods. Withdrawal, as we have seen, is essentially the action of the individual, based on his own conviction of its necessity. The difficulty for us is in feeling sure that the man is actually in one of the categories considered in chapter 1—a factionist, a denier of the faith, a persistent busybody and idler etc. The judgment of a spirit-aided eldership in such a matter was a great help. We must now rely on the completed Word of God and the help of men well versed therein. The absence of an apostolic eldership does not mean that we cannot "judge," or come to conclusions in these matters. The Apostle John expected the ordinary brethren to discern even between true and false spirit-gifted men by the rules he gives (1 John 4:1-3) and guided by such rules we must exercise ourselves as occasion requires.

Although withdrawal is personal it does not mean each acts entirely on his own. Collective consideration is doubtless appropriate in all cases, and not only in matters of personal offence. Not that any special authority rests in the collective assembly, as perhaps was the case under apostolic conditions. But it is clearly right that in the last stage all should come together, the "fathers" of the meeting should explain the situation, the person involved should have the opportunity to defend himself if he desires, and any brother be able to add his knowledge and wisdom on the matter under consideration.

Where the right spirit prevails it should be possible for everyone to arrive at a right conclusion, and agree that it is necessary for the brethren to withdraw themselves. Everyone must be exercised in the matter. For each there must be much thought, much anxious prayer, before undertaking the extreme step of telling the one concerned that he is not welcome around the Table. If there is a divergence of view, a decision should be postponed and the matter patiently pursued, seeking agreement. Where the spirit of love is found, action will not be based on little more than a majority vote. The golden rule should be in such serious matters, that ecclesial action waits until all, or nearly all, are agreed. The zealous individual must blend patience with his zeal.

Illustrations of Ecclesial Conditions

Spiritual health in ecclesias will vary now, as with the seven ecclesias in Asia. There follows in the rest of this chapter three illustrations of ecclesial conditions and the way in which the apostolic principles may be applied:

First Illustration

First there is the ecclesia where the Truth is still carefully cherished, and the fathers are able teachers. They will deal with error and doubtful questions firmly and wisely. They will be anxious to protect the flock from false teachers. In the rare case where withdrawal appears necessary, they will show this by a direct appeal to the scriptures, carefully comparing the case with one or more of the apostolic illustrations. Like Paul of old they will deal patiently with any who are being led astray, or who in some way are unstable. The platform of the ecclesia will be occupied only by those who are sound in faith and practice.

Second Illustration

Then there is the ecclesia where laxity prevails to a greater or lesser extent. We will assume that the teaching of first principles remains generally sound, and that the laxity is in dealing with the wrong views or practices of some in the meeting. This condition would be approximately parallel with the condition in Pergamos and Thyatira. Some in the ecclesia will attempt to bring the wrong or wrongs into the open, but they will probably find that the majority now love peace more than principle, and will not face up to the task of dealing with the wrongdoer and his subtleties.

What ought those zealous for the Truth to do in such a case? Should they separate and form another ecclesia or should they stay and fight against the errors and laxity?

When all things are considered the latter is undoubtedly the apostolic way. The duties of faithful brethren are such that only by remaining in the ecclesia can they be fulfilled. Paul tells of these duties in the words, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:4). Again,

"Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth (welfare)" (1 Cor. 10:24). The duty of faithful men is always with those who are being led astray, those who are unable to come to a decision and those who are babes in Christ. There are such in every ecclesia; brethren differ enormously in their capacity to rightly divide the word of truth, especially over the intricate questions which have arisen. Not all brethren are those "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). How unjust it is, therefore, to judge all the members as equally guilty with the offender they have failed to deal with, and to go out from the meeting.

In remaining in the meeting—which by the time this condition is reached will probably be a big one—the faithful will endeavour to act rightly towards each of their brethren. They will maintain an attitude of reserve towards the one in the wrong, and will keep away from his company as far as possible. The fact that he may come to the meeting and break bread is not contaminating and does not constitute fellowship with him; fellowship will only exist where there is personal sympathy. To the rest of the members of the ecclesia they will act with due regard for each one's ability and capacity; admonishing those who are too sympathetic towards the evil-doer, and patiently instructing those who are weak and unlearned. Their work will not be easy, nor their position comfortable, but their efforts may be crowned with the joy of bringing many of their brethren to salvation.

The cases we have considered in previous chapters—of Corinth, where several wrong beliefs were current; of Thyatira, with error openly taught; of Sardis, with its dead and defiled, show that as a general principle Christ and the apostles expected the faithful to stay. Whilst the passages examined in chapter one show that the duty of ecclesias is to make offenders go away there is no command for the faithful to separate if the ecclesia fails in this matter. The instances just quoted show that the absence of any such command is no chance omission. Doubtless the reason why the faithful should remain is because of their duties to the bulk of the brethren. Let it not be thought that we advocate laxity and tolerance in the Christadelphian body. Rather do we think that the practice of the faithful separating from an ecclesia encourages laxity, for it leaves the false teachers to have free play. It leaves the babes, the weak, the defenseless—those most in need of the help and guidance of faithful men—to the mercy of the unfaithful; and, in course of time, they too will fall away. The blame for this may well be placed by Christ at the door of those who left them to their fate.

How long such a situation will go on, cannot be estimated. Affairs will almost certainly get worse over the years. At some stage the general worldliness and laxity towards God's word will require a remnant to leave. But very probably long before this, the majority of the meeting will increasingly resent the testimony in their midst, and they will devise means to expel those who "trouble" them. There is an interesting comment on this by Bro. Thomas in Eureka: "The Apostolic Christendom, then, to which John wrote, was divisible into two sections, which were more or less commingled in the ecclesias generally—real and nominal Christians ... If the real Christians had the rule, the nominals would become impatient of their restraint and withdraw, or band together to subvert or corrupt the rule they disliked; and if they got the upper hand, the real Christians would be seen persecuted and expelled in disgrace; a consummation that obtained in the era of Constantine." Eureka Vol. 1, page 422, new edition page 362.

If a community adopts a foundation, either by statement or plain implication, that is subversive of the faith, and no longer provides a basis for salvation, brethren and sisters of Christ have no place there,

Third Illustration

But error may arise in an ecclesia in rather a different way from that envisaged in the second illustration. A situation may arise where some definite wrong teaching is introduced in the meeting, and some of the leading brethren support the wrong teaching. In such a case where there are teachers and advocates of opposite views from the same platform, it will be out of the question to continue for long as one meeting; a division of the ecclesia becomes a practical necessity.

When such a separation takes place, what to do and what not to do, is all-important. Governing their actions in accordance with the principles outlined in previous chapters, the side taking the right view will re-affirm their belief and practice in relation to the wrong-doer and his teaching, and appoint their own

faithful teachers. They will not set up a fellowship barrier and exclude all brethren and sisters from the "other side." As we have seen in earlier chapters, exclusion will only be appropriate to the one or more who, as evil men, should not be received. It must be emphasized that the elementary duties of assembling to remember Christ and to be instructed, must be allowed to all in Christ except those cases considered in chapter one.

Thus the separated ecclesia will accept as visitors at the Table those who choose to come to the meeting, having agreed with the synopsis of faith upon which the ecclesia is based. This allows those, who though not holders of the error themselves are unable or unwilling to come to a decision on the question at issue, the opportunity to come for instruction and the breaking of bread, and to be helped by association with faithful brethren. How long this arrangement might continue would depend on the particular situation, and how it developed over the years.

The Attitude of Other Ecclesias

It is important to perceive that the arrangement just described calls for autonomy of ecclesias. Any separation is a local matter, and is no occasion for circularizing the whole brotherhood and forcing ecclesias to take sides. Other ecclesias, by accepting at the Table all who endorse the first principles of salvation, will be able to determine their attitude to any who come from either of the divided ecclesias. They will be content to leave the matter at this, and will deal with any cases in their own midst as they arise. This would be real autonomy or independence of ecclesias, as distinct from the nominal independence of most ecclesias today. In apostolic times ecclesias were considered in this way; they were treated as individual bodies: we do not find Paul telling one ecclesia of the sins of another, neither does Christ in his letters to the seven churches ever suggest that one ecclesia is responsible for what is done in another.

Such flexible arrangements between ecclesias need not produce chaos, as some speculate. It would be possible and practicable to have ecclesias asking no more of each other than an agreement to an outline of the One Faith, and agreement to use the apostolic illustrations as their guide in dealing with wrong-doers. Only if a community denied the faith—as in the illustration of the last paragraph of Bro. Thomas' article on page 26—either by statement or clear implication, would other ecclesias dissociate from it. Where 'laxity becomes apparent in an ecclesia, brethren from neighbouring ecclesias would do what they could to stir up that ecclesia to a true appreciation. Such efforts would go on over the years.

But it would not be wise to look for ecclesial relations being restored to the conditions described in the previous paragraphs. It is very doubtful whether brotherhood to accept this more difficult but scriptural way of working. Let each one labour patiently in their own locality, endeavouring to "strengthen the things which remain."

Taken from The Christadelphian, January, 1870, pages 16-17

FELLOWSHIP IN THE TRUTH

In a private communication to a friend in the North, who had put some questions, Dr. Thomas writes on this subject as follows:

The Lord Jesus said: "I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me, that they may be one, being sanctified through the truth; that they may all be one, as Thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us, as we are one, made perfect in One" (John XVII). This unity of spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. IV. 3), is what John styles our fellowship, the fellowship of the apostles, resulting from sanctification through the truth. Hence all who are sanctified through the truth, are sanctified by the second will, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once. For by one offering he hath perfected for a continuance them that are sanctified (Heb. X 10-14), which one offering of the body was the annulling and condemnation of sin, by the sacrifice thereof (Heb. IX 26). This body which descended from David "according to the flesh," was the sacrificial victim offered by the Eternal Spirit (Heb. DC 14). If (David's

flesh were immaculate, this victim, descended from him, might possibly be spotless; but in that event, it would not have answered for the annulling and condemnation of sin in the flesh that sinned (Rom. VIII 4). If it were an immaculate body that was crucified, it could not have borne our sins in it, while hanging on the tree (I Peter II 24). To affirm, therefore, that it was immaculate (as do all papists and sectarian daughters of the Roman Mother), is to render of none effect the truth which is only sanctifying for us by virtue of the principle that Jesus Christ came IN THE FLESH, in that sort of flesh with which Paul was afflicted when he exclaimed "O, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. VII 11, 24).

It is not my province to issue bulls of excommunication, but simply to show 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 God speed (1 John IV, 3, 2; 2 Ep. 7, 9, 10). I have nothing to add or take from this. It is the sanctifying truth of the things concerning the "name of Jesus Christ." All whom the apostles fellowshipped, 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, but they—the anti-Christ—were not of us; for if they had been of us (of our fellowship), they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John II 19). The apostles did not cast them out, but they went out of their own accord, no being able to endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. IV. 3).

Then preach the word, etc., and exhort with all long-suffering and teaching. This is the purifying agency. 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, not on yours. If they help themselves to the elements, they endorse your declaration of doctrine, and eat condemnation to themselves. For myself, I am not in fellowship with the dogma that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh, or that he died as a substitute to appease the fury and wrath of God. The love of God is manifest in all that He has done for man. "When all wish to do what is right," the right surely is within their grasp. I trust you will be able to see it from what is now before you. And may the truth preside over all your deliberations, for Christ Jesus is the truth, and dwells with those with whom the truth is. Where this is I desire to be.

If I believe the truth as it is in the Jesus Paul preached, and fellowship the doctrine of an immaculate Jesus Paul did not preach, in celebrating the death of the latter with those who repudiate the immaculate body set forth by God for a propitiation, is affirming one thing and practicing another. Those who hold Paul's doctrine, ought not to worship with a body that does not. This is holding with the hare and running with the hounds—a position of extraordinary difficulty. Does not such an one love the hounds better than the hare? When the hounds come upon the hare, where will he be? No; if I agree with you in doctrine, I will forsake the assembling of myself with a body that opposes your doctrine, although it might require me to separate from the nearest and dearest. No good is effected by compromising the principles of the truth; and to deny that Jesus came in sinful flesh, is to destroy the sacrifice of Christ.

JOHN THOMAS

CONCERNING THE SUBJECT OF FELLOWSHIP IN EUREKA

The whole of Bro. Thomas' writings on the Letters to the Seven Ecclesias, covering some 200 pages in Eureka Vol. 1, are profitable reading in connection with the subject of fellowship. In particular, attention is drawn to the following pages: on Thyatira, page 335 (286-7); on Sardis, pages 353, 356 (302-305); on Laodicea, pages 412-15 (354-6). Four other instructive references are: Vol. 1, page 422 (362); Vol. 2, page 164; Vol. 2, page 219; Vol. 3, pages 444-7.

Two other sections should be read: "Why the Four Living Ones do not appear," Vol 2, pages 210-222; and, "The Sealing Angel," Vol. 2, pages 282-290.

EXPOSITIONS OF THE ERRORS IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES

False Apostlescommencing Vol. 1, page 192 (163)
The Nikolaitanescommencing Vol. 1, page 197 (167)
The Synagogue of Satancommencing Vol. 1, page 230 (196)
The Balaamitescommencing Vol. 1, page 288 (246)
The Woman Jezebel.....commencing Vol. 1, page 323 (276)
Development of the
Name of Blasphemycommencing Vol. 3, page 200

The bracketed figures refer to the new edition of volume one.

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