

## Scriptural Fellowship

There is one point of which we can be sure at the outset—sincerity and earnestness alone are not enough. I believe the clearest and most striking evidence of this is Paul's statement about the Jews in Rom. 10:2,3—

*"I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but NOT ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGE. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."*

Paul himself was a perfect example of this—fanatically earnest and sincere, but still terribly astray from the Truth and misguidedly destroying God's people and aiding their enemies.

Many in the world today, though far from the Truth, are agonizingly sincere and earnest. Jesus said—

*"The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service"* (John 16:2).

There are many things besides earnestness and sincerity that are necessary to make a man acceptable and useful to God.

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You ask: "What is our true relation to those who use the name Christadelphian and believe its general principles but do not recognize the need for standing aside from certain errors?"

I believe there is only one place that we can draw the line of distinction, and that is the point of fellowship. There is no other logical stopping point or dividing line. We are either in holy communion and fellowship with another, or we are not. All distinctions outside that are secondary.

If the difference between us is such that fellowship is not possible, then the difference between us is VERY IMPORTANT, for fellowship is the most important thing in life.

We must each decide where the commands of God lead us to draw the line of fellowship. Having prayerfully and to the best of our ability determined that point, then all mankind fall into two classes and only two—those with whom we fellowship on the one hand, and all the rest of the world on the other.

This is not, of course, to say there are no distinctions in all the rest of the world, for there are secondary distinctions, but they in no way compare with this primary dividing line.

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Of that large general class in the world with whom we do not fellowship, there is one particular section that has a bearing on this question. In 2 Thess. 3:14-15, Paul says—

*"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."*

Part of the "word by this epistle" was to "withdraw from those who did not walk according to the tradition" (teaching) of Paul—see v. 6 of same chapter. If any refuse to withdraw when they should withdraw, they are "not obeying our word in this epistle."

In these vs. 14-15 Paul introduces a class with whom we are to have no company, yet we are not to count them as enemies but to admonish them as (erring) brethren. This is not out of harmony with Jesus' command (Matt. 18:17)—

*"If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."*

To be "as a heathen or a publican" is the same as to have no company. (We are not to treat heathens and publicans as enemies—Jesus does not contradict Paul here—I believe he uses the terms heathen and publican to emphasize the separation, the keeping company.)

It seems to me that these words of Jesus and Paul define our relationship to those groups that go under the general classification of Christadelphians, just about as well as possible. (I do not like to use the term "other fellowships," because it is a self-contradiction—there can truly be only ONE Fellowship).

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As to the question of supporting them by attendance at their lectures and other activities, this is unwise, and is contrary to sound scriptural principles of a clear separation. Let us pause, and think it through, and judge it by its fruits. Where does such a course lead? Where has it led in the past? Its only effects can be—

1. An encouraging of them in the course they are mistakenly following, instead of faithfully warning them;
2. Weakening the unity and distinctness of our own fellowship, and misleading the weaker ones among us, perhaps to their own destruction, instead of strengthening them, and
3. Blurring the clear edges of the scriptural precepts of Truth and sound fellowship, instead of shining with a sharp, distinct light and sounding with a clear, unambiguous trumpet.

Its final result can only be a disintegration of what we are striving to build up and hold together, and an eventual drift with all the rest into a shapeless, powerless, lifeless, "Reunion" after the tragic pattern repeated over and over since the days of Noah.

Let us rather **DRAW MORE CLOSELY TOGETHER AMONG OURSELVES** in love and unity and fellowship. There is always much to be done that is constructive.

Those of us who have attended lectures and activities of other groups—let us be very honest and frank with ourselves (for these are issues of life and death), and ask ourselves—

Do we wholeheartedly, and actively, and faithfully, attend and support and encourage and participate in all the activities of our own ecclesia and fellowship?

Let us each examine his own heart, in the searching light of the Word of Him to Whom everything is naked and open. We should be trying to teach our young, by precept and consistent example, the deep value and meaning and beauty of true scriptural fellowship.

We find this viewpoint, no matter how gently it is presented, causes intense bitterness and intolerance on the part of those whose outlook is broader (though they speak so much of "love" and "mercy"), but bitterness on the part of the great majority has always been the reception the Truth of God has received. It is far too narrow and holy and exacting and humiliating to the mind of the flesh. We should do everything we can (faithfully) to avoid causing bitterness, but it should never influence us from the path of right.

True indeed, the more mercy that God in righteousness is able to show in the end, the happier every loving child of God will be, but it is not for us at present to confuse the issue and corrupt

the Truth by justifying unfaithfulness in fellowship on the plea of "mercy." It is not true mercy to encourage what is wrong.

These other groups are "separated brethren"—brethren to be kept separate from and admonished, but not to be regarded with enmity or bitterness. Our only PRACTICAL problem is how to act in relation to them. Paul settles this clearly, as seen above.

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As to how we are to abstractly consider them, or try to determine their position before God (present or ultimate), I do not regard this as a profitable consideration.

The "Body of Christ" is, in the ultimate sense, the approved—the redeemed—the glorified. Who will ultimately constitute this Body obviously we cannot say. That is the great purpose of the judgment-seat of Christ. *"Judge nothing before the time."*

As to the present application of this expression (Body of Christ), that at best can be but a tentative consideration. Paul says (Heb. 3:6,14)—

*"Whose House (Body) are we IF we hold fast . . . we are made partakers of Christ (his Body) IF we hold steadfast."*

At any particular time, therefore, the present constitution of the Body is but tentative and potential. So we cannot apply the term to any at present in an absolute sense. I certainly believe it would be unwise and questionable to apply this term "Body of Christ" to any with whom we can not in faithfulness break bread, for the Scriptures obviously restrict the term in its true sense to the faithful, and if we consider a man to be faithful in the scriptural sense, we have no right to stand aside from him in fellowship.

Jesus said, *"Judge not, that ye be not judged"* (Matt.7:1). He also said, *"Judge righteous judgment"* (John 7:24). The mind of the flesh will play those two statements against each other—the mind of the Spirit will perceive their harmony.

We have judged to the extent of standing aside from those who do not fully accept and apply what we believe to be the first principles of fellowship. To this extent we have judged and must judge. We believe these "brethren" are in error in the position of fellowship they take, and we believe faithfulness calls for a standing aside and a testifying against their error (admonition), and an endeavor to persuade them to forsake the error. James said—

*"Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).*

Beyond this, I would rather hope, and not judge. Jesus said—

*"Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48).*

From this it would appear that responsibility varies according to capability and opportunity and circumstance. Paul says—

*"What have I to do to judge those that are without? Those that are without, GOD judgeth" (1 Cor. 5:12-13).*

Once we have faithfully testified by separating in fellowship, I believe we should leave all further judging to God (though not neglecting to try to persuade them, and warn others, of the unsoundness of their position).

But our main concern and duty is with the "things that remain." These we are exhorted to build up and "strengthen," and to carry the good news of the Kingdom to the world.

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On the matter of fellowship—the greatest single problem and hazard in the Truth—we must simply find out what the Scriptures say, and OBEY THEM. As soon as we begin to philosophize away the clear instruction of Scripture, we can end up making black white, and making shipwreck of the Faith. Such is the mind of the flesh.

*"Come out from among them and BE SEPARATE"* is a very deep, and wise, and sound, and clear, and simple principle. The more fully we comprehend its implications, the safer the Truth is in our hands, and the better chance it has to stay alive in the earth.

—G.V.Growcott, Berean 1961