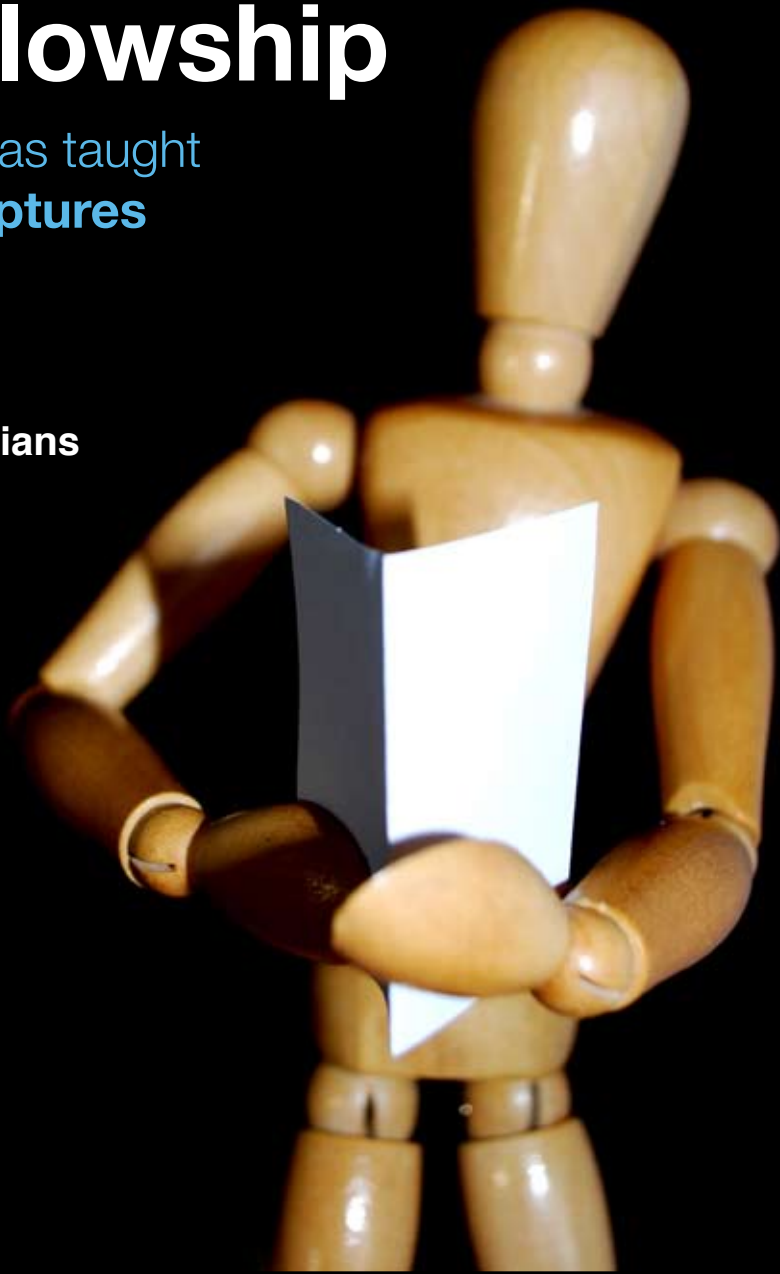


Principles of fellowship

Fellowship as taught
in the scriptures

A study for
Christadelphians

M Davies



Contents

Preface	page 1-4
About this document	1
A personal background & history	1-4
Introduction - What is fellowship?	page 5-7
The splinter “mind-set”	5
Principles not details	5
The classic history lesson	5-7
The pioneer problem	7
Imagine	7
Part 1 - The dividing line	page 8-18
The word “fellowship”	8
What is it we should be sharing?	8
The basis of fellowship (“common sharing”)	8-11
The apostles’ doctrine	11
The BASF	13
An apostolic statement of faith	13
Can we add to the Gospel?	15
What it means to be a “Christadelphian”	16
Separation from unbelievers	16-18
Part 2 - The house of God	page 19-43
The one body	19-21
Ecclesial life	21-22
Ecclesial autonomy	22-25
Doctrine vs practice	25
Matters of doctrine	25-26
Matters of practice	26-34
Faith vs works	34
The process	34-35
The idea of guilt by association	35-38
The doctrine of the Pharisees	36
Tips for Old Testament considerations	37
Individual and ecclesial responsibility	39-42
The idea of block disfellowship	42-43
Conclusion	page 44-45

Preface

About this document

This document is a summary of studies around the subject of fellowship. "Fellowship" is talked about widely in all Christadelphian circles but its roots and Biblical meaning are often neglected. This document is an attempt to let the Scriptures speak for themselves on this subject in the hope that others may find help and comfort in the things contained within.

The document is split into two:

Part 1 "The Dividing Line"

This section of the document examines the positive aspects of fellowship. What exactly is fellowship and how do we become "in" fellowship?

Part 2 "The House of God"

In this section we examine key issues which often stop brethren and sisters being united and seeks to examine how we are to find company with fellow believers.

A personal background & history

I grew up, and was baptized into Christ in a small group of Christadelphians called the "Watchman Fellowship". During my eight years in that group they averaged around 70 members in the UK. The Watchman are a split off from the Dawn fellowship, who are a split off from the Berean Fellowship, who had split from the Central Christadelphians. They have very strict views around marriage and divorce.

This was the version of the Truth I inherited, not by any choosing but by being born into it. I'm sure there are many others within

Christadelphia in similar circumstances, they have been "born" into a fellowship (including Central) but have never really had to question whether they were in the right place.

When I was 18 years old a split occurred in which one of my sisters and I found ourselves on the opposite side to my father and mother. This tore our family apart and they and a few others set up another fellowship called the "Aletheian Fellowship".

I was taught that fellowship was about being of "one mind" on doctrine. "Doctrine" included the commands of Christ. Anybody you deemed not to be of "one mind" with you was somebody who you could, and should 'withdraw fellowship from', as otherwise by breaking bread with them, you also would partake of their sins or condone their views. Withdrawal was basically "ex-communication". You did not have such a person to your meetings, you did not spend time with that person unless you were trying to bring them back. Some of the Scriptures answered within this document were used to support this view and I very much agreed with it, even giving Bible classes in support of this idea which at the time I thought was right.

As time went on an issue arose relating to worship which I did not see eye to eye on with the majority of the fellowship.

“ This was the version of the Truth I inherited, not by any choosing by being born into it ”

Five of us 'withdrew' ourselves from the Watchman and went into isolation. We did not mind this though as we considered that this was the trial that God had sent us and that we were keeping the truth "pure" and upholding the principle of fellowship. This had been the same stance I took against my father and mother when they had divided from the Watchman.

With the "fellowship mind-set" which we possessed we were going to set about adding clauses to our statement of faith to define who we would now accept into our group. Before doing this however we decided to undertake a Scriptural study of fellowship itself.

One thing that I worried about was that I couldn't be one of the last people on the planet who still maintained the truth. Either I was extremely special or our view on fellowship, which we had taken through to its bitter end was wrong. There were many expositors of the Scriptures that we respected in the Central fellowship who were far more knowledgeable than us - how could they be so wrong in regards to fellowship?

Many studies took place and it soon became apparent that there were a few issues with our views in the light of Scripture. After a while we started to see that our views were a

“ Five of us 'withdrew' ourselves from the Watchman and went into isolation ”

little hypocritical. We believed that we should all be of one mind and in the Watchman we took that as being on virtually everything - especially in practice & walk. We'd heard and used the terms 'matters of conscience' and 'matters of fellowship', but the so called 'matters of conscience' were not classed as 'matters of fellowship', even though they can be proved from the Scriptures.

Here are some examples:

- 1) Some feel that sisters should not wear trousers. They believed they had Scriptural reasons to back up this view. Other sisters would be comfortable wearing trousers. They too would believe the Scriptures were in their favour. This situation was not made a 'matter of fellowship' because that would have been considered extreme.
- 2) Interpretations of prophecy, or the expounding of certain principles often threw up differences of opinion. These were never deemed matters of fellowship - even if they touched upon conduct. How was this possible if we were all to be of "one mind" on everything?
- 3) There are passages in Scripture which forbid sisters to plait their hair, or to wear gold but, to my knowledge, sisters doing either of these has never resulted in fellowship being withdrawn from them.
- 4) Some brethren/sisters seemed to feel it was alright to go over the speed limit when driving - they sometimes

even had a bit of a joke about it in private discussions. This was not deemed a matter of fellowship (and sometimes not even challenged), but other matters of illegality were and are dealt with severely - why? It is suggested the driving offences are 'matters of conscience'.

- 5) Some brethren and sisters would illegally own copyrighted music or software. Again something which was known of but never made a "matter of fellowship". Again there was an unevenness in how illegality matters were viewed. However if conscience comes into it then why was it that "conscience" didn't have a bearing on some other matters which were considered cut and dry?

Despite the above, the issue of marriage and divorce was hotly held as being a matter of fellowship. This did not simply mean if you were a divorcee you would not be accepted but even if you held the view that divorce may be acceptable in certain circumstances you would not be allowed in fellowship.

There didn't seem to be any Scriptural reasoning as to why some conduct issues were matters of conscience whilst others were matters of fellowship.

The above are just a few things which made us start to consider that the view that had been handed down to us was a little uneven. The main question that kept coming up was "What differentiates something from being a 'matter of fellowship' in one case or a 'matter of conscience' in another"? These,

and other thoughts made us want to look into the subject of 'Fellowship' more deeply from a Biblical point of view.

After about 6 months of pondering, study and prayer, my wife and I finally decided that the Central fellowship maintained the Scriptural view of fellowship and so joined the Nottingham Forest Road Ecclesia in early summer 2008. This was a complete surprise to everyone who knew us, as Central had previously been perceived by us as extremely astray - we

were ignorant however of the Scriptural teaching on fellowship and on the arguments against our "Watchman" mindset.

Since then we were blessed with an opportunity to present these studies to my parents who have now also joined Central from the "Aletheian" fellowship along with a handful of others, including my nan and younger sister. We are also thankful that my uncle and his family have also since left the Watchman and joined Central.

This document is a summary of our studies on fellowship that led us to change our previous views on this subject. I would ask that this document be read with Bible in hand; that you erase from your mind any man-made ideas on this subject; and that you allow your mind to be filled with the Word

“

what differentiates something from being a 'matter of fellowship' in one case or a 'matter of conscience' in another?

”

and ONLY the Word. Discard human pride and fleshly thoughts and allow yourself to ponder these things with an open mind.

The topics in this booklet are challenging but we remember that the Bereans were "*more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*" Acts 17:11. Let us do likewise and let God be glorified in all that we do.

Brother M Davies

Nottingham Forest Road
March 2010

Introduction

The splinter “mind-set”

There are certain “ideas” which most, if not all splinter fellowship groups hold at least one of. These ideas are all interlocked and form the foundation and justification of their group having nothing to do with any of the members of the main group of Christadelphians (Central), or any other of the splinter groups. These underlying principles are that:

- **Autonomy is wrong** - “Autonomy” is the individual independence of each ecclesia. It is thought that in both doctrine and practice all ecclesias should be of “one mind”. If one ecclesia determines that another is not dealing with an issue they can (and will) step in - even if the ecclesia with the problem was far away on another continent. The idea is that the responsibility of upholding the truth in both doctrine and practice is shared between all members of the fellowship group and is fellowship wide.
- **Guilt by association is real** - This idea is one which is the driving force. It is thought that if a member of the group, or an ecclesia, was to spend time with, agree to differ with, or accept into their midst (even at a lecture in some instances!) an erroneous brother or sister that the guilt of such a one will pass to all who accept them. The idea is that if this happened at one ecclesia then the rest of the ecclesias would also become “contaminated”. This idea is powerful as it plays upon human fear and pride.

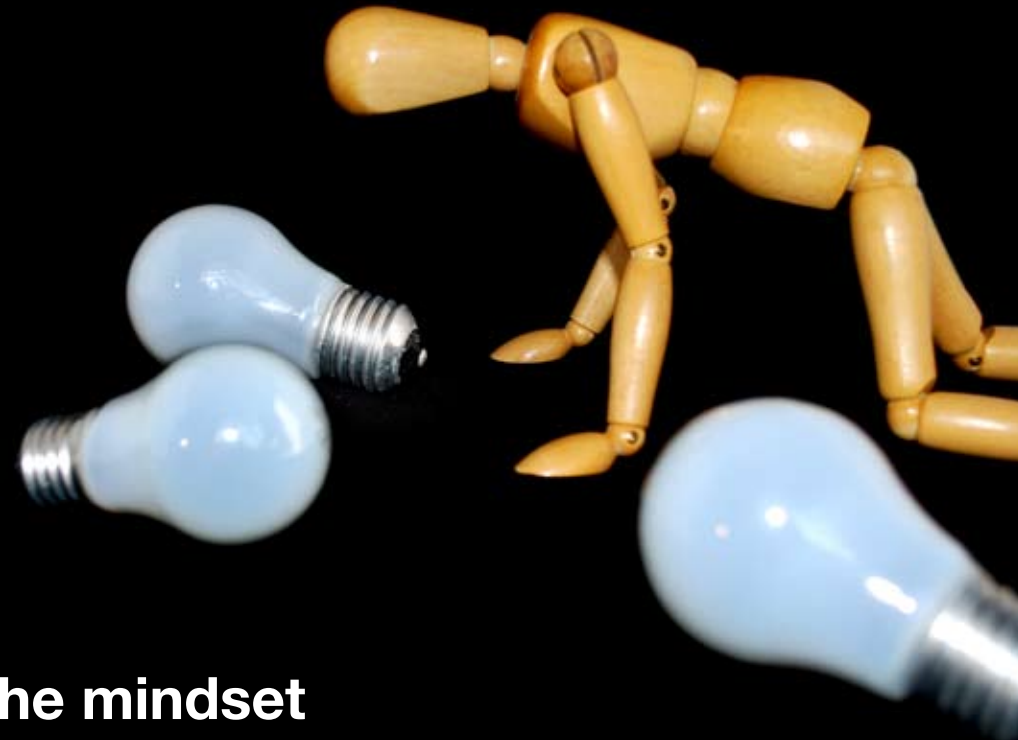
- **Block “dis-fellowship” is right** - this idea is that not only will an ecclesia withdraw from an individual, they will also withdraw from anybody who would accept that individual at their meeting. Even if somebody wasn’t practicing the error of the person withdrawn from. This could result in whole ecclesias being cut off as well as individuals.

Principles not details

It was only until I had looked at the subject for some months and then tried to explain my views to someone else that I realized I had these three underlying foundation principles! They were so ingrained within my thinking that it was only when I had taken a step back and looked at the principles of my understanding and not the details that I discovered them. This document is all about looking at the underlying principles of fellowship - not the detail.

The classic history lesson

“Fellowship” as a topic was studied in the Watchman but the underlying principles were not. A fellowship study usually consisted of going back through time and looking at all the divisions which had led to the path the Watchman were now on. We would be told “they were wrong” and “we were right”. In most cases the beliefs of the forerunners were plausible and correct, but were the *principles* upon which they carried out their stand correct? Since joining Central I have met many who believe *exactly* the same as the members



The mindset of splinter groups:

- **autonomy is wrong**
- **guilt by association is real**
- **block “disfellowship” is right**

of the “Watchman” group in regard to individual cases but who have not separated themselves from the main body of Christadelphians. Why? There are whole ecclesias who are of the same mind as splinter fellowship groups on a number of issues. Why are the groups separate from those ecclesias and brethren and sisters who agree with them? It’s because of the three main principles we have already outlined. The question is “are these principles Scriptural”? We might know our history but that doesn’t mean we know our Bible - it is to the living Word of life and not to man-made history books we should go to determine what principles should govern who we recognise as our brothers and sisters.

“
...were the principles upon which they carried out their stand correct?”

For these reasons it is clear that, before we look at what our early brethren believed we should first go to the Scriptures to determine the principles of fellowship. It is only then that we will be able to see if their views marry with Scripture. We must not try and make the Scriptures marry with what we think the pioneers’ position might have been.

Imagine

So, dear reader, inevitably it is to the Scriptures we must turn as the only authority on the topic of fellowship.

We must wipe our minds of all human programming and imagine we were not brought up in, or brought into a Christadelphian “fellowship”. We need to mentally sever all family and friendship ties which may have influenced us to have attached ourselves to a particular group. We need to imagine there is no history - that we are coming to this subject fresh.

We can now ask the all important question - “what do the Scriptures say about the principles of fellowship”?

The pioneer problem

Another place many go to justify their position is the valuable writings of the pioneers - brethren John Thomas and Robert Roberts. These can be, and are, a source of great knowledge and experience. However it is easy for us to have quotes presented to us out of context and emphasis given where perhaps it was not intended. Sometimes the background to specific statements is very different to the circumstances the quote is being applied to.

All groups of Christadelphians quote the pioneers to justify their position - *including Central!*

PART 1

The dividing line

The word “fellowship”

As with all questions worth finding the answer to; we go in humility and prayer, to the Scriptures. A good place to start is to do a simple word study using our concordance. When we look up the word “fellowship” we find that this word is never really used in Scripture in the way we now use it in 21st century Christadelphia.

“Fellowship” in the Bible is the Greek word = “koinonia” - it is used in several ways and translated into the following: “fellowship”, “communion”, “communication”, “distribution”, “contribution”, “to communicate”. Broadly it simply means a “common sharing”.

An interesting point to note is that the word “fellowship” is never used to describe a group of people. If you go through your Bible you will discover that nowhere is anybody described as belonging to “a fellowship”. Nowhere do we find the phrases “they were in *this* fellowship” or “they belonged to *that* fellowship”. It is not a “legal” statement in this respect. Neither is the word used (as we do today in the 21st Century) as meaning “socializing”. Yes, socializing comes into it but that is not the whole meaning of the word. As mentioned above the word fellowship

simply defined means “a common sharing”. We either have this “common sharing” with another person or we don’t. As we go through this study we are going to look at what exactly this common sharing is in.

So just by looking at the word “fellowship” we have to ask ourselves the question; “have we added *additional* meaning to this word”?

What is it we should be sharing?

So what is it we should be sharing? Is it a common understanding of every “jot and tittle” of Scripture? Is it every subject of belief? Is it every practice in life? What brings us into this “common sharing”?

The Bible itself declares the basis of fellowship and not man, so what does it say on the subject?

We will now endeavor to show that the “Gospel” is the dividing line – this is what separates us out to be a people for God’s name.

The basis of fellowship (“common sharing”)

Let us then consider the Scriptural basis for what brings us into the saving name of Jesus Christ. The things that are necessary for baptism - the Gospel message:



1 Corinthians 4:15

"For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

Paul inherited the responsibility of looking after the saints at Corinth because of their acceptance of the Gospel. They were "in Christ" through the Gospel.

Mark 16:15-16

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Faith in the Gospel message has the power of salvation - it is this knowledge that is required for baptism "into Christ". See also Romans 1:16 and 2 Timothy 1:10.

2 Peter 1:3-4

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

Everything which pertains to life is found in the knowledge of God and a belief in God's promises; this enables us, in God's mercy, to gain eternal life. The promises are what constitute the Gospel.

Ephesians 2:11-13

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh... That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

Through the covenants of promise and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ we have a hope - we are with God, we are in the commonwealth of Israel. It is the knowledge and belief in the Gospel which separates us from the world; and consequently we are united with each other. Later in verses 18-22 we read that these things have brought us into

The promises

The 3 major promises of Scripture, or "The Gospel" which enable us to be in fellowship:

1. **Genesis 3** – promise of the seed which would destroy the serpent power.

Associated doctrine: atonement in Christ.

2. **Genesis 12-22** – promises to Abraham – Gal 3:8 Paul calls this "the Gospel"

Associated doctrines: resurrection, forgiveness of sins, Israel to be a great nation, atonement in Christ.

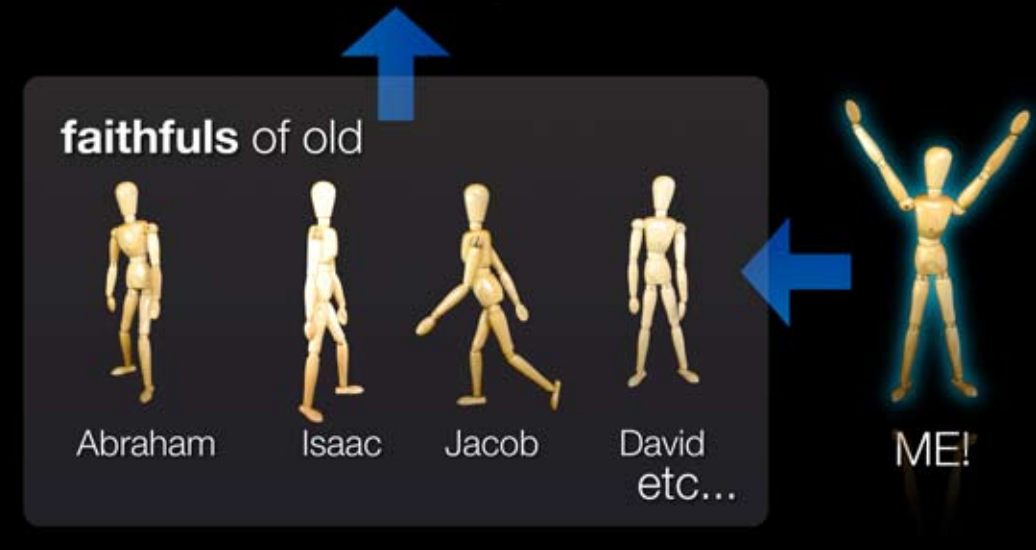
3. **2 Samuel 7** – promises to David

Associated doctrines: Christ on the throne, Kingdom of Israel restored on earth, resurrection, Christ's second coming.

The Gospel = 3 covenants + associated doctrines NOT extra additions. This knowledge separates us. The foundation of fellowship is belief and baptism into the Christ through the gospel.

A common sharing

fellowship in the gospel



the household of God. There is no mention here of any other knowledge which brings us into this relationship - simply the Gospel.

Philippians 1:4-5

"Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now"

Paul had "common sharing" - fellowship, with the believers of the Philippians through their belief in the Gospel. It is clear then that the basic principle, the criteria for and the foundation of fellowship is the Gospel – not additions. We later read in verse 17 that Paul was set for the defence of the Gospel. He would defend these beliefs as we should. Because the simplicity of the Gospel is the basis of our common sharing we can't tolerate any differing views, interpretations, or ideas upon, the Gospel message. For these beliefs to be attacked would mean that the very thing which binds us together would not bind us any more.

In verse 27 we read that we are all to be of one mind upon the Gospel message. Sadly in Christadelphia (and mainly the split-off groups); there are many other ideas that have been made a condition of fellowship, which all fall outside the realms of the Gospel message.

The Gospel then, the simplicity which is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3), is the foundation of our common sharing with each other. We share the same hope and the same beliefs; which bring us out of the world into God's household, as his sons and daughters through Christ.

It is a wonderful thing to consider, that our fellowship together - being based upon the Gospel - unites us with the patriarchs of old.

They lived under *different commandments* to us but all *believed* in the *same* things as us - the Gospel - which gradually unfolded down through time. We therefore have a common

sharing with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and all those who believed in the Gospel.

The apostles' doctrine

The apostles' basis of fellowship was also the Gospel.

1 John 1:1-3

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 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."

The things which the early believers saw and witnessed - concerning the outworking of God's purpose through the Lord Jesus Christ - enable us to have a common sharing with them, and with the Father and the Son. It is through such knowledge (the Gospel) that we are all bound together into God's plan as we have already seen in the previous passages.

1 John 1:5-7

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 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."

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we read that the "light" is the glorious Gospel of Christ. We have a common sharing in that light. We have been called out of the darkness and so it is expected that we walk within the precepts of the Gospel in newness of life. This is how

“ We have been called out of the darkness and so it is expected that we walk within the precepts of the Gospel in newness of life ”

we display that we are in Christ and it is how our faith is measured.

It is important to remember that the word "fellowship" is not a legal term and these statements in John are not legal statements we can use to condemn others. We all sin and the apostle is encouraging us not to. He is reminding us of the common sharing we all have with Christ in the Gospel.

If this was a "legal" statement and "fellowship" is a state we are "in", then it would mean that we all flitter in and out of fellowship on a moment by moment basis - one moment walking in the light, the next in darkness. In fact it would mean that we might not ever be able to know if we were in fellowship or not, as the heart is deceitful above all things. However, if the whole of the epistle is read; it is clear that John is intending to show the love of God toward us, and what our response should be - by how we individually live our lives on that basis.

Galatians 2:7-10

But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that

was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

It is Christadelphian tradition to offer the right hand of fellowship to new members of an ecclesia. The above verse shows us that it was the Gospel that was the basis of Scriptural "right hands of fellowship". Paul was given charge of preaching "the Gospel" to the Jews; and when James, Peter and John saw this they gave Paul and Barnabas the "right hands of fellowship" - this act was based upon them knowing that Paul had the Gospel, the basis of fellowship.

In the first century, those who believed this message and were baptized were recognised by the apostles as brethren and sisters of Christ - even if they had lived lives which seemed contrary to that high calling.

Act 2:41-42

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

After hearing Peter's word (the Gospel/ promises in Christ), the multitude were baptised. They continued in the "apostles' doctrine" (the Word/Gospel they had heard) and therefore they 'were in' & 'continued in' fellowship - a common sharing with the apostles.

“ They continued in the "apostles' doctrine" (Gospel they had heard) and therefore they 'were in' & 'continued in' fellowship - a common sharing with the apostles. ”

The simplicity



Knowledge of the Gospel
"Simplicity in Christ"

Baptism

Enter "into" Christ

Fellowship (Common sharing) with God & Christ in **the gospel**

The BASF

The BASF - or "Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith" - is the basis of fellowship for most Christadelphian groups . Most split-off groups however add to it as a stipulation of fellowship. Many additions are based upon past divisions; and so the addition to the statement of faith is used to define and distinguish the splinter group. Most - if not all - additions are not in fact 'points of faith;' but 'a defining of a position on a commandment of Christ.'

The BASF was the original ecclesial statement of faith of the Birmingham Central ecclesia which Brother Robert Roberts attended. When the Brotherhood first started, each ecclesia had their own Statement of Faith; but as time went on most ecclesias adopted the BASF because it is an excellent summary of what we believe.

This original Christadelphian Statement of Faith was amended (not added to) in January 1898 to clarify beliefs on resurrectional responsibility.

If you were to examine the BASF you would find that its focus is on the Gospel message as we would expect. There are two sections; the doctrines to be accepted and the doctrines to be rejected. The doctrines to be accepted are an outline of the Gospel message with all its essential aspects listed in simplicity. The doctrines to be rejected are those which directly conflict with the Gospel; and so cannot be held by true believers.

For these reasons, the BASF (without additions) is a truly Scriptural basis of fellowship; and it fulfils the

requirements of fellowship - as we have seen in our study so far.

The original Christadelphian group - called the Central fellowship - recognises as brethren and sisters those who believe in the BASF (without any additions to it) and have been baptised. It must be said though, that this statement is not perfect - and is a document written by man. As it is a human compilation we are not bound to it; as the Scriptures are the authority on this subject - however, it is a good summary of the Gospel as contained within the Scriptures.

An apostolic statement of faith

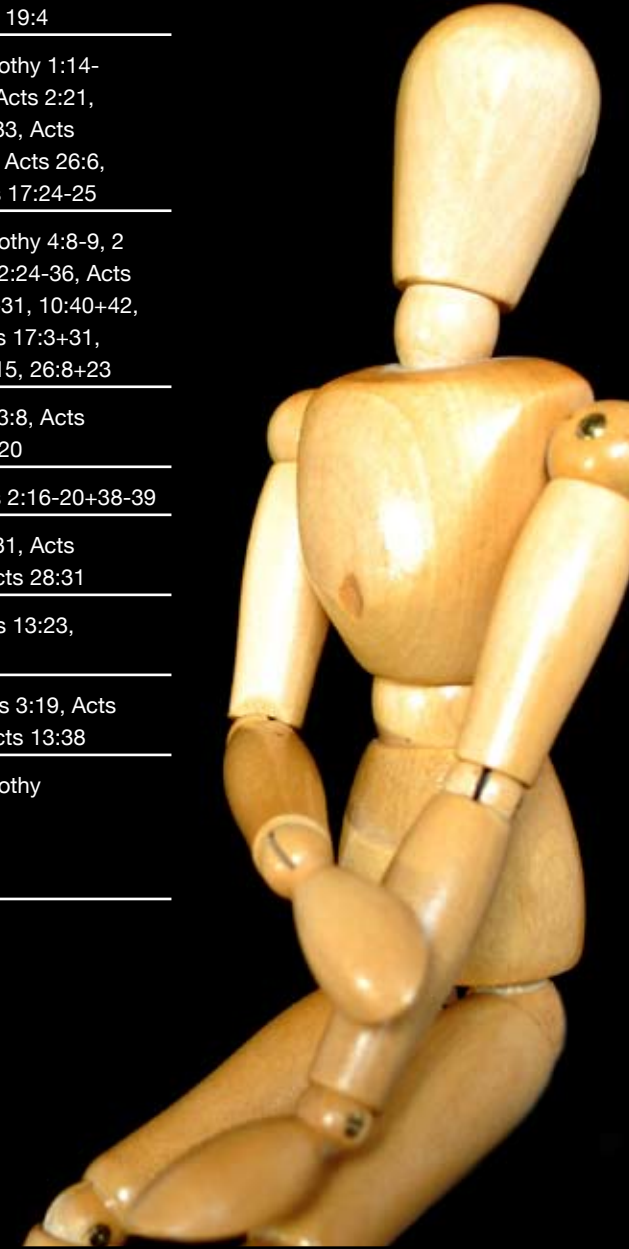
It is clear from the Scriptures that the Apostles themselves had - as it were - a "Statement of Faith". The reason we know this is that if we compare the 'preaching speeches' in Acts, the 'five faithful sayings' of the Pastoral Epistles, the 'six foundation doctrines' of Hebrews 6 and the 'seven ones' of Ephesians 4 they all amount to the same core beliefs. They are all based upon the promises of old, the Gospel as we have seen.

It has to be remembered, that the apostles were also preaching to people who mostly accepted the law of Moses and the principles set forth there. Doctrines like the unity of God, the Creation, the promises of God and so forth; would already have been believed; so they did not need to be emphasised.

In our day and age, many of these doctrines have been corrupted by the great apostasy; hence the need to clarify our Scriptural beliefs to a greater depth than the apostles would have done in their preaching of the truth.

The apostles' statement of faith

Doctrine	References
Baptism	Hebrews 6:2, Ephesians 4:5, Acts 2:38, Acts 19:4
Faith in God and His promises (the Gospel)	Hebrews 6:1, 1 Timothy 1:14-15, Ephesians 4:4, Acts 2:21, Acts 3:13, Acts 13:33, Acts 15:7-9, Acts 19:18, Acts 26:6, Ephesians 4:6, Acts 17:24-25
Resurrection & Judgement	Hebrews 6:2, 1 Timothy 4:8-9, 2 Timothy 2:18, Acts 2:24-36, Acts 3:15+26, Acts 5:30-31, 10:40+42, Acts 13:30+33, Acts 17:3+31, Acts 23:6, Acts 24:15, 26:8+23
Repentance from dead works	Hebrews 6:1, Titus 3:8, Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19, 26:20
Holy Spirit	Ephesians 4:4, Acts 2:16-20+38-39
Return of Christ & Kingdom on earth	Acts 3:20, Acts 17:31, Acts 19:8, Acts 20:25, Acts 28:31
Christ the Messiah	Acts 10:36+38, Acts 13:23, 26:23, Acts 28:31
Forgiveness of sin	1 Timothy 1:15, Acts 3:19, Acts 5:31, Acts 10:43, Acts 13:38
Laying on of hands (appointment of sound elders in the ecclesia Acts 6:3-6)	Hebrews 6:2, 1 Timothy 3:1, Acts 20:28



Can we add to the Gospel?

So we have seen then that the “Gospel” is the basis of fellowship. Can we add things to the Gospel which then become a ‘matter of fellowship’? The Scriptures clearly show that additions to the Gospel are not matters of fellowship - additions do not determine if somebody is a brother or sister in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:1

“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”

There is a suggestion here, that more was required for salvation than belief and baptism into the Gospel. These men from Judea were adding to the foundation of the Gospel - as many of the Christadelphian “fellowships” do. This is the occasion of “The Jerusalem Conference” - the early believers gathered to discuss whether more clauses should be added to the Statement of Faith.

Acts 15:7-10

“And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God... put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts

by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

Peter makes a defence and tells them that it is THE GOSPEL which is the basis of “being saved” (v7). The GOSPEL is the context here. Later in the conference (v14), James confirms Peter’s earlier statement regarding THE GOSPEL being that which takes us out of the nations and makes us a people for God’s name. (Note:- NOT the commandments of Christ which all other Christian groups would agree with - what distinguishes us is THE FAITH we hold).

So this passage proves to us that additions to the Gospel (in this particular case, the addition of Circumcision), are not matters of fellowship. It is interesting to consider that neither a “for” or “against” was added to the statement of faith - simply some sound advice, which seems to be a peacemaking compromise (see v28-29).

What it means to be a “Christadelphian”

Colossians 1:2

“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ.”

As we have seen, if we accept the Gospel message and are baptized, we enter into God’s household and become His “sons and daughters” (2 Corinthians 6:18 - see also Galatians 3:24-29, 1 John 3:1 and Matthew 6:9). We associate ourselves with Jesus Christ without whom this would not be possible and we become Christ’s “brothers and sisters”. This is a Scriptural title. The word “Christadelphian” is an anglicized amalgamation of two Greek words that mean “brothers in Christ”.

A Christadelphian then, in its most truest sense, is the title given to anybody who has believed the Gospel and has been baptized. There have been “Christadelphians” since the Lord Jesus’ time and it is not just a modern name. The question is do we recognize the Scriptural definition of a Christadelphian and do we practice the obligations that that recognition demands?

Separation from unbelievers

At this stage it is worth highlighting that the special calling to which we have attained does require a separation from others who have not accepted this call. There is a Scriptural requirement for a distinction to be made from those in Christ and those out of Christ, from believers and unbelievers.

2 Thessalonians 2:12-15

...they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

In this passage we have a Scriptural term, which many of us use without thinking about its actual meaning. When we say, “The Truth” what does that really mean? We see here that it actually means ‘the Gospel’ (see also Galatians 2:5+14, Colossians 1:5 and Ephesians 1:13). Obviously, the whole of Scripture is Truth, but within that is a golden thread which is termed ‘THE Truth’ (the definite article), which we have to know to be baptized - the Gospel.

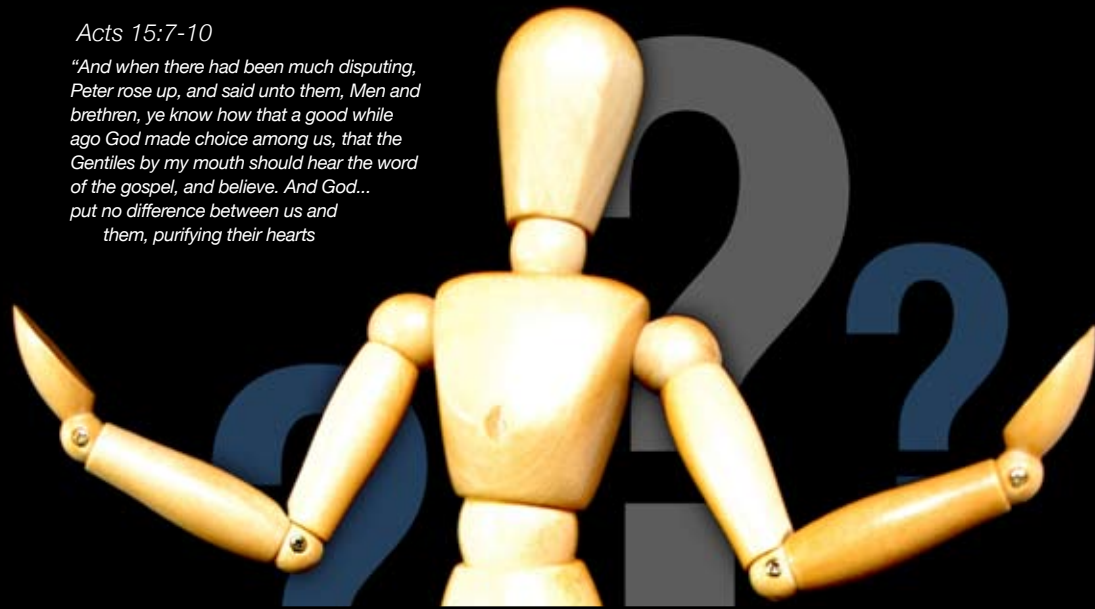
Once we have been baptized, we can then progress and learn about other principles and issues that are true, but they are not ‘The Truth’; they aren’t needed for baptism, therefore they aren’t necessary for ‘fellowship’.

We have been called to “The Truth” which is the Gospel, which we have to stand fast in. We will not tolerate beliefs contrary to the Gospel message; that’s the dividing line.

2 Corinthians 6:14+17

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate...”

It is clear from this verse that we must be separate from unbelievers of the Gospel.



Unbelievers should not attend our private meetings and join with us in worship, for they do not have a “common sharing” with us in the hope of the promises of God.

Acts 19:8-9

*“(Paul)... spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and **separated the disciples...**”*

Here we briefly join Paul in his activities in Ephesus. We can clearly see that after an attempt to preach the Gospel became fruitless Paul separated himself and the disciples from these unbelievers. We must separate from first principle error. Paul later reminds the Ephesian ecclesia of this in Ephesians 5:11.

Ephesians 5:6-11

“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”

We must not be deceived by vain words. Where do these words we

“
Unbelievers should not attend our private meetings and join with us in worship for they do not have a “common sharing” with us in the hope of the promises of God.
”

are warned about come from? Look in the margin for ‘children of disobedience’ and you will see that it means ‘children of unbelief’. The context is that we must not be deceived by those who don’t accept the Gospel.

We are in the light; because we have believed the Gospel, and been baptised into Christ. Those outside are not in the light because they are in the world and are children of unbelief.

This verse then is talking about separation from the world, not separation from brethren and sisters - although it is often sadly misquoted in an attempt to support this. We cannot be in “fellowship” with those who do not believe the Gospel. There is the dividing line again.

1 Timothy 6:1-5

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

Although the teaching here is initially about masters and servants (see verses 1 and 2), the context is about those “destitute of the truth” - those that are not consenting to the doctrine of the Gospel. Timothy was to avoid anybody who was in that category.

Separation from unbelievers

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate...” **2 Corinthians 6:14-17**

“(Paul)... spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples...” **Acts 19:8-9**

2 Timothy 3:1-7

*“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of **the truth.**”*

We are living in these last perilous days. The exhortation here is the same as in the previous verses that we have examined - we must “turn away” from those in the world; those who are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”.

Acts 10:1-6

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God... He saw in a vision... an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him...send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter... he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”

Here we have a man who fears God; he does the works - but is not in God’s house. He did not know the Gospel, and therefore he was not saved. In Acts 11:12-14 Peter records the events and mentions the detail that “the words” he was to speak to Cornelius would save him. The Gospel is what saves us when we are ungodly sinners.



PART 2

The house of God

We have seen from our study already that the Scriptures are quite clear on who is a “brother or sister” of Christ as opposed to an “unbeliever”. The distinction is on the basis of belief and not works. We hope to show in this section that *the Gospel* is necessary for *fellowship* (a common sharing) but ultimately it will be the effort we put into following the *commands of Christ* that will determine, in God’s mercy, if we are given *salvation*. How we live our lives also effects our ecclesial life and who associates with us - even within the community of “brothers and sisters”.

So we now move on from considering how the individual enters the “household of God” to look at how individuals within this household should respond to one another.

The one body

Ephesians 1:20-23

(God)... hath put all things under his (Christ's) feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, **Which is his body**, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Ephesians 3:6

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the **same body**, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is **one body**, and **one Spirit**, even as ye are called in **one hope** of your calling; **One Lord**, **one faith**, **one baptism**, **One God and Father of all**, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

We have been placed, through the mechanism of baptism and a belief in the Gospel, into the spiritual “body” of Christ. Paul tells us there is only ONE calling,

only ONE faith and only ONE baptism. It doesn’t matter what name you might call your fellowship group, it doesn’t matter what you think you know about other areas of Scripture outside of the Gospel. It has to be accepted by the authority of the Word of God that anyone who believes the Gospel and is baptized is in that one body. The major question for us here is; “do we recognize other members of the one body”?

1 Corinthians 1:12-13

Now this I say, that every one 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 ye baptized in the name of Paul?

The rhetorical question is one to reflect upon. Is Christ divided? It should not be so. We should not call ourselves after the names of men - “I’m of this fellowship and I’m of that”. We should be recognizing the work of the Lamb of God and realize that we are all baptized into *his* name and not the name of any particular brand of fellowship. Are we dividing Christ? It is interesting to consider that before Paul deals with the serious matters of immorality within the Corinthian ecclesia he addresses the fact that they were divided. This implies that this dividing element was of more importance than the gross immorality! If we continue on in verses 14 and 15 – Paul goes back to

“

The major question for us here is; “do we recognize other members of the one body”?

”

the basics and reminds the Corinthians of the knowledge of Christ, the Gospel, which enabled them to be baptised. Under this knowledge they were to be united.

1 Corinthians 12:12-25

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath **God set the members** every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. 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. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: **That there should be no schism in the body**; but that the members should have the same care one for another...

What a powerful lesson and humbling thought. God Himself has placed us all in the ONE body. It is not up to us to construct our own! He has set down the rules of entry as we have seen and who are we to deny that?! It is clear from this verse that whether we like it or not we need other members of this body. We have a responsibility to other members - this is very clear, especially if we

The ‘oneness’ of our call



“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” **Ephesians 4:4**

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” **1 Corinthians 12:12**

were to continue reading 1 Corinthians 12. We cannot say we are better off on our own.

Romans 12:4-5

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

So we are members “one of another”. Paul is saying we belong together and stressing that although diverse we are all one in Christ.

Matthew 10:40

He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

It is a wonderful thing to contemplate, that after being called through the Gospel and baptism we come to represent the one who died for us. Each individual brother and sister of Christ individually represents Christ and made up together they are his spiritual body.

The question is therefore whether it is right for us to divide that body based upon other additions to the Gospel? Consider Galatians 3v22-29 – we are “all one” in Christ Jesus.

Ecclesial life

The Scriptures teach that those within the body of Christ are to gather on a local level into groups. These groups of people are called “ecclesias” or “called out ones”. “Called out” by God through the Gospel. The apostles instituted this way of operating, establishing different roles within each ecclesia. For example:

Titus 1:5

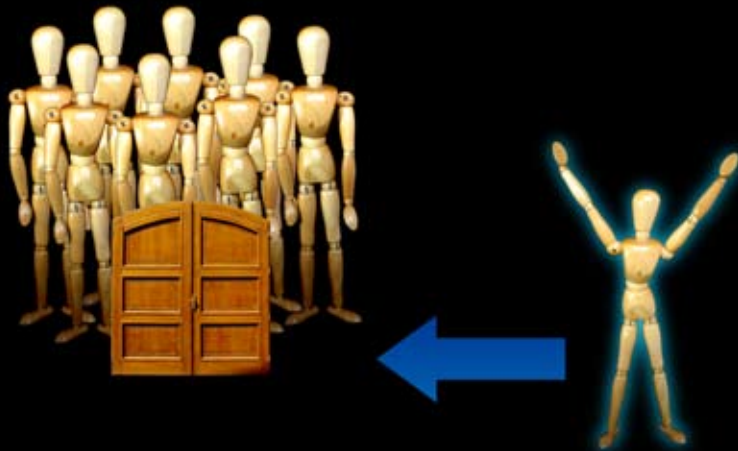
For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

So as a body it is absolutely Scriptural to have different ecclesias responsible for

Ecclesial life

“...know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the ecclesia of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

1 Timothy 3:15



their own affairs in their own locality.

Hebrews 10:25

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

So we are baptized based on a faith in the Gospel and once baptized we join with others who have been called by the same Gospel. We must not “forsake” this assembly. In the Greek “forsake” is the word “egkataleipo” which Strong’s tells us means “abandon” or “desert”.

Within the “ecclesia” there are responsibilities. We must each use our talents to glorify God, help our brothers and sisters and further the cause of the Gospel. There are different roles to fulfill for both for men and women.

Some positive aspects of fellowship responsibilities include:

- Worshiping God together - *Ephesians 5:19*
- Exhibiting “agape” love - *Ephesians 5:2*
- Service and submission - *Matthew 23:11*
- Resistance of anger - *Colossians 3:8*
- Forgiveness - *Matthew 5:24*
- Speaking positively about others - *James 4:11*
- Supporting and labouring for others - *Acts 20:35*
- Giving ourselves to hospitality - *Romans 12:13*
- Helping those in need - *1 John 3:17*

- Bearing burdens - *Galatians 6:2*
- Speaking to edify each other - *Ephesians 4:29*
- Making peace - *Romans 14:19*
- Praying for one another - *James 5:16*

It is clear from the above selection (which is by no means exhaustive) that the ecclesia then is the arena in which our characters will be developed. It is only in ecclesial life for example that we can develop service and submission with “agape” love.

If we cut ourselves off from the ecclesia we cannot fulfill these. The only thing which was not “good” before the fall was the fact that Adam “dwelt alone” (Genesis 2:18). Do we recognise who our brothers and sisters are? If we accept they are those who have been baptized into Christ then we have to apply the above responsibilities. As we have seen, we clearly have a responsibility to other members of that body which God has set in place.

Ecclesial autonomy

Most split off fellowship groups will claim that they do not accept ecclesial autonomy (independence). It is true that on matters of doctrine (things affecting the Gospel) local ecclesias have a responsibility to enquire if the ecclesia in their locality is preaching a false doctrine. We are to be of “one mind” on the Gospel and saving truths in their simplicity (Philippians 1:27).

However on matters of practice it is up to each ecclesia to manage its own affairs. I have personally found that where this is not the case, a group of people within a

fellowship group will arise and feel that they can go around challenging every aspect of another ecclesia's conduct. They do this because they believe that everyone has to be of "one mind" on everything - even on subjects outside of the Gospel. In their zeal to find purity, these "fellowship police" pick up on the things that they don't agree with and if after the steps of Matthew 18 are followed they are not happy, there would be a split. This could take place with issues that are occurring far away from the locality of the ecclesia finding fault.

Because 'ecclesial autonomy' is not believed in, it would then be up to each ecclesia in that 'fellowship' to decide if they agreed with the proposed withdrawal of the person/persons in question. Even if this was an issue on the other side of the planet, an ecclesia would have to decide. If they found that they were not happy they would separate

from the main group and start their 'own fellowship'. Sometimes splits went three ways. The idea is that if an ecclesia does not officially "withdraw" and support the other ecclesias' decision, it is considered to be in agreement with and therefore supportive of the individual - this idea has been termed "guilt by association" and we hope to examine it later in this study. All members of such a group have to agree on any matter (including matters of practice) which have come up for withdrawal.

I used to operate under these rules and due to a series of circumstances, found myself in isolation. It was only then that I started to question these traditions and go back to the Scriptures on this matter. I understand that those in the splinter groups are there because they believe that is what they need to do to maintain the integrity of the truth. However, just because the motive is

genuine doesn't necessarily mean the action is correct. Have these operational rules been generated by the Scriptures or is this something that has been introduced by man?

The truth of the matter is that in the time our master remains away autonomy is the *only* way for the body to operate practically. Fellowship groups who claim they do not have ecclesial autonomy usually do in some small way - with individuals avoiding certain ecclesias.

Not operating under autonomy is only workable in a "small fellowship" - in the main body there are hundreds of ecclesias all over the world. Can you imagine practically how it would work if we all had to make a decision on every withdrawal of any ecclesia throughout the world? Did the early believers do this?

Revelation 3:7-10

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

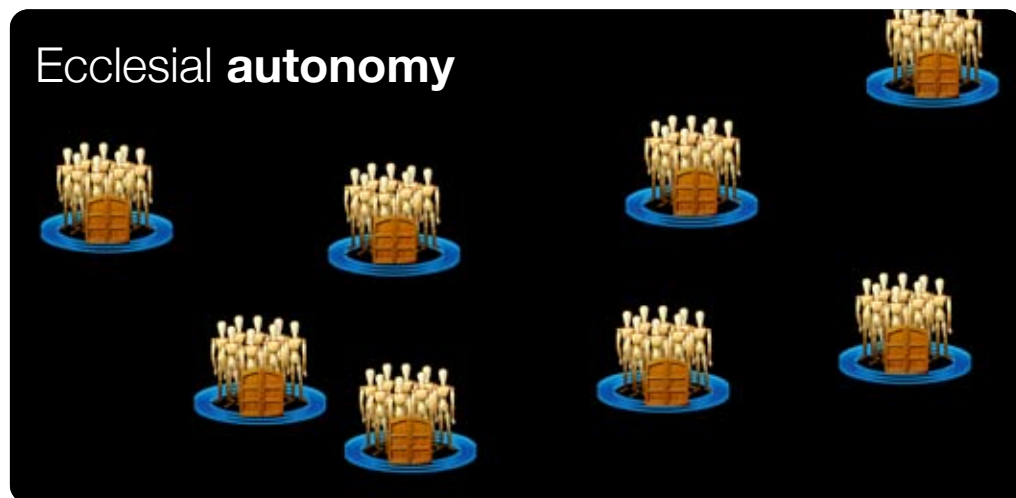
The Philadelphia ecclesia, was the only ecclesia which was not condemned by Christ in his letters in Revelation. If ecclesial autonomy was correct why wasn't this ecclesia condemned for not sorting out the

other ecclesias problems? It was *not* guilty for another ecclesia's error. It was *not* asked to sort the other's problems out and it was *not* asked to split off from them. By writing to each ecclesia individually, the Lord Jesus Christ himself is operating according to the idea of ecclesial autonomy. Surely therefore, we need to be very careful before we criticize people who see this as a way of operating.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

*It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, 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 unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

After dealing with the 'division' within the Corinthian ecclesia, Paul then moves on to deal with this matter of practice. What is interesting about this is that he allows the ecclesia itself to make the decision on the erroneous walk of its member. He advises that when *they* come together that *they* withdraw. Paul leaves the responsibility to the ecclesia whose member is walking erroneously. It seems that they took Paul's advice and did withdraw from this brother as we read of Paul advise to take him back in *2 Corinthians 2:6-8*. Again though, he leaves the responsibility collectively to the ecclesia. So each ecclesia is responsible for its own members and is independent in this



respect. One ecclesia will not be condemned or praised for what another is doing. As we continue on we will see this principle being brought out time and time again.

Doctrine vs practice

As with any aspect of life this side of the Kingdom, there are always going to be difficulties with members of ecclesias.

There are actually two types of issues which can grow up and have to be dealt with on an ecclesial level. We can face doctrinal issues and issues around practice. By doctrinal we mean that there is a problem with a belief of a brother or sister which impinges on the first principles - the Gospel itself. By practice issues we mean an issue concerning how a brother or sister is walking. We now hope to examine these issues and how the Scriptures distinguish between them.

Matters of doctrine

Of the two issues this is surely the most serious. This is where a 'brother' or 'sister' holds a view contrary to the Gospel.

There is no doubt that in such a case, action has to be made because this individual now no longer holds the saving truths.

2 John 7-11

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 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.

The context of this verse is that John is warning of deceivers who would corrupt the first principles and in particular the doctrine that Jesus came in the flesh. This is a matter of first principle as it effects the whole purpose of God. John tells us that if one comes to our ecclesia (house) we should not receive him. It is clear then that on a local level there is a responsibility to deny false teachers a place in the ecclesia. John also tells us not to bid them "God speed" for by doing so we also will partake in his evil deeds. The word translated "God speed" simply means "rejoice" (in fact it's the same word rendered such in verse 4). So we are not to rejoice in the teaching of error because if we become sympathetic to it we have lost the very basis of our calling. We cannot accept differences of belief on the first principles.

It must be emphasized that this verse is speaking of doctrine not practice. Brother Robert Roberts once wrote this: "*He that biddeth a rejector of the truth God-speed is a partaker of his evil deeds.*" (*The Christadelphian Vol 11[1874] p386*) - i.e. he interpreted 2 John as people who aren't in the Truth - those in the world as the context shows.

It is also important to note that John exhorts the ecclesia itself. He says "look to yourselves" - again we see him operating under the idea of ecclesial autonomy, giving the responsibility to the ecclesia on a local level. Doctrinal error then is to be stopped at the ecclesial door.

Galatians 1:8-9

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

It is clear from this verse that there is a strong condemnation on those preaching things contrary to the first principles.

1 Timothy 1:18-20

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

2 Timothy 2:16-18

But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

2 Timothy 4:14-15

Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

Assuming these passages refer to the same Hymenaeus and Alexander we can piece them together and have an interesting insight into how the apostle finally dealt with erroneous teaching against first principles. The doctrine which was under

attack was that of the future resurrection.

This of course is a key first principle because without it we have no hope of salvation. It probably also impinged on the return of Christ to the earth. It is this early corruption of the Truth which led to the idea of the immortal soul creeping into 'Christianity'.

There can be no doubt that the apostle Paul had "withdrawn" himself from these two false teachers after much discussion with them. He also warned Timothy of them. They had in fact condemned themselves due to their teachings against the first principles and this idea is picked up in Titus:



Titus 3:10-11

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

Strong's tells us that the word "heretic" here is a "follower of false doctrine". Again we see that discussion must take place but if someone persists in false doctrine they must be "rejected". If we use this verse to justify our separateness from other brothers and sisters have we also applied the first and second admonition to all whom we are rejecting or are we simply picking the part of the verse we like the sound of and ignoring the rest? Again, note the context of this verse is false *doctrine*, not practice.

Also notice those that speak contrary to the doctrines of the Truth are condemned of

Matter of Doctrine

(erroneous belief)

- No longer believe saving truths
(no common sharing at all)
- Responsibility to the whole "body of Christ"
- Cannot accept compromise
(unanimous)



themselves. This brings another interesting aspect to the situation of matters of doctrine. On an individual level we are the ones who keep ourselves within the "common sharing" - "in fellowship", because of the first principles we believe in. If we move away from these first principles and teach things contrary to it, we are "condemned" of ourselves by the words which we have spoken. This also is the lesson of Galatians 1:8-9. Again we see that the "common sharing" is held by those who believe and uphold the doctrines of the Gospel - if they leave this doctrine they have removed themselves from that sharing. Historically Christadelphian ecclesias have formally recognized this by writing into the "Christadelphian Magazine" but ultimately it is the erroneous brother or sister who has removed themselves from fellowship, as they no longer believe the Gospel.

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.

Paul tells the ecclesia at Rome to avoid false doctrine and those attempting to split the brotherhood with erroneous views that cause division.

2 Corinthians 11:2-4

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted

from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

Paul here is warning the Corinthians not to "bear with" somebody who comes preaching another gospel. The Greek word for "bear" is 'anechomai' which is also translated as "suffer", "forbear" and "endure". The Corinthians then were not to tolerate false teachings around the Gospel message. The Gospel message, as we have seen, is the very thing which brings us into fellowship and we must therefore be fervent about its preservation. When a believer sadly starts to teach things which are against the saving truths of the Gospel they are in effect, unbelievers. They are 'unbelievers' because they doubt the very things they should 'believe' in! They have left the body of believers and should therefore be treated as such by their ecclesia. They should not be allowed in, as we read in 2 John 7-11. It is clear then that the word of God tells us we must not have people in our ecclesias who do not accept the saving truth of the Gospel.

If we do come across first principle error within an ecclesia which is not ours then, as the Ecclesial Guide by Robert Roberts sets out, we do have a responsibility to pursue this - leaving the final decision to that ecclesia itself to sort out. I have seen first hand that this does happen in Central.

Matters of practice

It really goes without saying that any brother or sister should be striving to adhere to

the commands of Christ. As a basis of our considerations we will remind ourselves of a few passages which prove this:

James 1:22

*But be ye **doers of the word**, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

Matthew 28:19-20

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to **observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you**: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

Romans 6:4

*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should **walk in newness of life**.*

Matt 7:21

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

John 15:14

*Ye are my friends, **if ye do** whatsoever I command you.*

1 John 2:4

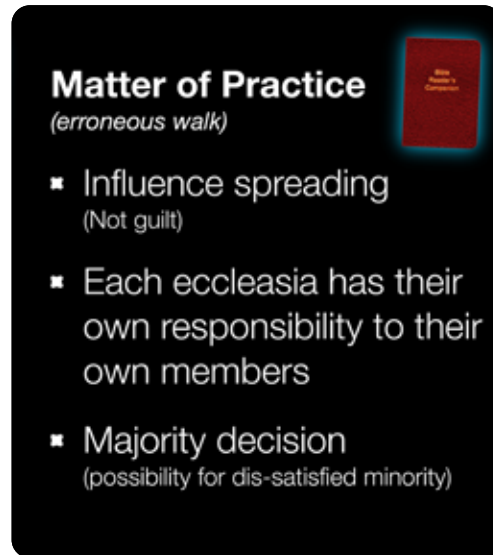
*He that saith, I know him, and **keepeth not his commandments**, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

There are clear obligations to adhere to the commandments of Christ after we have believed and been baptized. Although the Gospel is necessary for "fellowship" (our common sharing), adherence to the commands are ultimately necessary for "salvation" (although, of course, we can never earn salvation).

Herein lies another reason that an ecclesia might not accept somebody into its midst - that an individual is not following the commandments of Christ in the way they are living their lives. There are key differences though between how a matter of practice should be viewed and how a matter of doctrine should be viewed.

The problem with matters of practice is that in some instances we only have principles to act on rather than specifics. With a matter of doctrine it is clear that preaching the doctrine of 'the trinity' for example would be totally unacceptable. It is clear-cut and obvious. The problem with practice is that we do not have an example of every potential situation and how we should deal with it exactly. This is part of ecclesial life and the "trial of your faith" which is sent to bring forth spiritual gold tried in the fire (1 Peter 1:7). This is why we are not bound together on an understanding of every single potential way of following a command but as individuals and as ecclesias we have to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12)

Take for example a brother who may have become an alcoholic. Different ecclesias might approach this problem in different ways. Ultimately of course this behavior would not be acceptable within an ecclesia (1 Corinthians 5:11) but how the issue is handled by different ecclesias would differ. One might attempt to show love and support to the brother and keep him within the ecclesia as best they can (whilst he is sober) to help him through his problem. Another might tell him immediately he is



Matter of Practice
(erroneous walk)

- Influence spreading
(Not guilt)
- Each ecclesia has their own responsibility to their own members
- Majority decision
(possibility for dis-satisfied minority)

not welcome until he sorts himself out, in the hope that the shock will make him deal with his problem. They might insist that he must be sober for at least 2 months before he can return. Which ecclesia would be right? Surely it would be for Christ to decide and not the rest of the Brotherhood.

Also within those fictitious ecclesias we can imagine there would be differences of opinion on how to deal with the issue. Bibles might be opened prayerfully and any number of passages examined with different brethren taking different views. They would each be attempting to balance Scriptural principles and the circumstances to which they were to apply them. It is possible that when this was put to a vote that there would be a "dis-satisfied minority" which should never be the case in regards to a matter of doctrine.

I use this example to show that we will have differences of view upon commands and how to apply principles to them where it is not specific in the Word. However we should never have differences of view on doctrine.

From a logical perspective we can see that although we are all striving to keep the commands of Christ, how we keep them might be different. The commands are clearly not what binds us together in fellowship, in a "common sharing". What one ecclesia might find acceptable is not necessarily going to be what another ecclesia finds acceptable. They are still all within the body of Christ however - based upon the Gospel message.

We now hope to look at a few passages which give us examples of how to deal with matters of practice and the individuals involved.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

*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. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves **disorderly** among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you **disorderly**, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. 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**.*

We have put this lengthy quote here because it is essential to see the context of these verses. Split off groups will quote verse 6 repeatedly and often out of context. Here we have before us a specific problem in the Thessalonian ecclesia which Paul had heard of; that some members were not working for a living but, instead, were scrounging from the ecclesia. Paul equates this action to "walking disorderly". He shows that even when he was among them in the work of the Truth he worked for a living. Paul was a tent maker and worked as such so as not to be a burden upon others (see Acts 18:1-3 and 20:33-35). He tells the Thessalonian brethren to withdraw from anybody who refuses to work for a living.

This verse cannot be applied as a blanket statement for any problem we have with another brother or sister. The brethren, as an ecclesia, were to note anyone who didn't work and avoid them. They were to "withdraw" from them. Did this mean they were to cast them out of the "fellowship", to view them as being apart from the "common sharing"? No. They were to count such as brethren still. Why? Because the basis of fellowship is the Gospel. They are still in the body of Christ. Although they were to be avoided, they were not to be

“
We can "avoid" them but we cannot sever fellowship, our common sharing, which is based upon a belief and baptism into the body of Christ.
”

Reasons for withdrawal

The Scriptures tell us plainly that we are to avoid those who walk erroneously. They also tell us why.

1. For the individual's sake - to make the offender ashamed and address their wrong doing - to win him back.

1 Corinthians 5:5, 2 Thessalonians 3:14

2. Influence spreading

1 Corinthians 5:6,7, Galatians 5:9

3. We are commanded to!

1 Corinthians 5:11-13, 2 Thessalonians 3:6

treated as an enemy. This is talking about a particular issue at the time and it *doesn't* prove we can "dis-fellowship" from brethren and sisters because of their walk. We can "avoid" them but we cannot sever fellowship, our common sharing, which is based upon a belief and baptism into the body of Christ.

This of course is a very different attitude to teachers of false doctrine. Although both classes might not be welcome at an ecclesia, this class of people "walking disorderly" are still considered as "brethren in Christ" because of the Gospel.

It can be argued that verse 6 can apply to any "tradition" the apostles established - i.e. any jot or tittle of any of the apostles' teaching. It is argued upon the basis of verse 15 of chapter 2 which states "*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*"

However, if we look at the verses preceding v15, we can see that the context for this is those "falling away" from the Truth v3,12- the saving truths which of course form the bedrock of the apostles' "tradition". This was the Gospel (v14). So piecing chapters 2 and 3 together we can see that the apostles' "tradition" covered both doctrine and practice. The word in

the Greek is "paradosis" and Strong's gives the meaning as: "*a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing, i.e. tradition by instruction, narrative, precept, etc.*"

We have already established that "unbelievers" were to be excluded from the ecclesias. Here we see that an ecclesia can also withdraw from somebody whose walk is not in keeping with the practice of the apostles. We shall examine this idea further as we go on.

However we need to consider the following points if we are to use this verse as a way of cutting ourselves off from others:

- Paul is speaking to a specific ecclesia here - totally in the realms of the principles of ecclesial autonomy and leaving the responsibility with the ecclesia to "avoid" offenders.
- Paul is speaking here about individuals

who were members of that ecclesia and cannot be applied to "cutting off" whole groups of ecclesias as some use this verse to do.

- It has to be remembered that verse 6 of chapter 3 is in the context of a specific case. We need to be careful before applying it as a blanket verse - especially in cases which are not "clear cut". There may be different aspects of the "tradition" of the apostles, in regards to practicing the truth, which compete against each other. We must balance principles in such an instance lest we find ourselves not standing fast in the apostles' traditions ourselves. For example many use this verse to justify their separation from hundreds of brethren and sisters they have never met and have never opened a Bible with! Is that the spirit of the "apostles' tradition"?
- Chapter 3 must be speaking of those walking erroneously as opposed to those who believe in a false Gospel because they are still to be called "brethren" (v15). They were still in the "common sharing" but were walking in an erroneous way.

This passage is the cornerstone of most split off groups' argument that they should be separate from the main body. That they can be separate from whole groups of ecclesias based on things outside of the Gospel. Are we sure this verse is giving us the license to do that?

1 Corinthians 5:5

To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

We have already looked at this passage in the context of ecclesial autonomy. We mention it here again but this time in the context of how we deal with matters of practice. Here we have a case of blatant disobedience to the commands of Christ and gross immorality. Paul recommends to the ecclesia they "deliver such an one unto Satan". What does this mean? Satan as we know means "adversary". If this person was avoided and not welcomed into the ecclesia then they would be outside with the "adversary" the darkness of the world. This situation would in itself be an "adversary" to the offender and is intended to help them reflect upon their actions and be a "destruction of the flesh" - or in other words help them to destroy their rebellious fleshly thinking. It is clear what this phrase means, as later Paul says "*now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator*" (v11). On an ecclesial level then we have a duty to "avoid" and "not keep company" with brethren and sisters who blatantly disobey the commands of Christ and whose influence (leaven see v6) can have an effect upon us. Note that the offender in v11 is still termed a 'brother'.

With careful reading however we find that not every member of the Corinthian ecclesia agreed with this decision.

In 2 Corinthians 2 we read this:

2 Corinthians 3:6-8

Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

Paul then is asking the ecclesia to accept this brother back into their midst - in effect taking away the punishment inflicted by many. In the greek the word "many" is "majority" or as Strong's puts it "greater in quantity". This gives us an amazing insight into how we should conduct ourselves in regard to matters of practice. The ecclesia is to gather together. Then the *majority* are to decide to withdraw or not. This means that there must have been a *'dissatisfied minority'*. The Ecclesial Guide picks up on this. There was not a division! There were some members for the withdrawal and some against - how does this sit with the idea of guilt by association? If this idea were true surely Paul would have told the majority to then withdraw from those who were not part of the majority! However the scriptures is silent in this respect. Surely this would of been a key time to tell the ecclesia of the concept of guilt by association?! What it does tell us then is that on matters of practice an ecclesia gets together and the *majority* decides to withdraw or not.

Titus 1:10-16

For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not

giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

In this reference Paul tells Titus to rebuke deceivers who were preaching things contrary to "the faith" for material gain. Although we can't be certain from this verse exactly what is meant by "whose mouths must be stopped" it's obvious that there is a responsibility to contend and rebuke error in both doctrine and practice. The context here seems to be the walk and practice of the believers that Titus was coming across and especially those who taught things about practice which was not in accordance with the commands of Christ.

We have seen then that an avoidance is required on matters of practice which have a bad influence on others.

Galatians 6:1-10

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh

“

God is the ultimate judge and will not be mocked.

”

shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

So we have a responsibility to restore a brother from a fault or "any trespass" as this is translated in the New King James Version. This passage provides a warning and advice for how we should deal with matters of practice. We should do so, not because we will be contaminated or accountable for the action of those walking erroneously but because we may be influenced and become in error ourselves. Surely this verse proves that we can stay amongst error, trying to restore those at fault, as long as we are not being influenced to do wrong. How can we marry this with the previous verses which tell us to avoid error? The context of this verse is clearly telling us that it is only if the error is not influencing us that we can remain to contend against it. If we find the error is influencing the ecclesia then we must withdraw. It is a choice that has to be made with the main motive being the restoration of the brother or sister involved.

Another thing which comes from this is that even those walking in a fault are still in the "household of faith" - they are still brothers and sisters! Also as we all suffer with sin, if we think we know something we don't (consider

Faith vs works

Brother John Thomas in *Elpis Israel* page 258-261 has a brilliant explanation as to how faith and works go together in his chapter entitled "The summary of Abraham's faith" and we highly recommend that you read these 4 pages. Brother Thomas shows that sinners are saved by faith. This can be seen by the following verses:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Titus 3:4-8

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.

Brother Thomas also goes on to show that we are not saved by faith alone but that saints must continue in good works as seen in these verses:

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Revelation 20:12

...and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Titus 3:8

...they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

The "good works" are the commands of Christ. It is therefore essential that we are all trying to follow these.

Our salvation then is two fold - faith and works combined into one life of servitude to Yahweh.



Matt 7:3-5 – do we have a mote in our eye?!). We must be very careful when dealing with our brethren and sisters. God is the ultimate judge and will not be mocked. We will reap what we sow, we will be condemned for our *own* actions alone and not those of others.

The process

It might be worth pointing out here that our Master lays out a process on how to deal with personal problems within an ecclesia.

Matthew 18:1-17

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 church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

The context here is about personal issues within an ecclesia but this process could and should be applied to all issues within the brotherhood.

The process is clear - personal discussion must take place, then if this is unfruitful witnesses must be brought. If there is still a problem then the whole ecclesia must be told. The responsibility on how to deal with the problem lies with the ecclesia. It's worthy of note that this passage doesn't say here you should withdraw/ dis-fellowship from the offender.

I wonder how frequently this verse is and has been ignored - especially by those in split off fellowships. How can we split ourselves off from those we know believe the same Gospel as us (and are therefore our brothers

and sisters, in Christ) without following this process? For years I had believed the propaganda which came from the platform of a split-off group without questioning it and without even speaking to my brothers and sisters in the main body - even though some turned out to live within a short distance from our family home and believe, in regards to doctrine, exactly the same as me!

The idea of guilt by association

This idea is held by many of the split off groups. It is thought that by being in the same "fellowship" as somebody who holds a variance on belief as you/ is disobeying a command, you will be held responsible for what they are doing / believing. It is the main reason why split off groups continue to divide and divide.

It is essential to study to see if such a principle exists. We would expect it to be explicitly explained to us in the pages of God's word because our eternal salvation would be at stake. We would expect our Bibles to be clear-cut—making the issue unmistakable and un-questionable.

This idea though is neither Scriptural nor is it logical.

As we have seen, we do have a responsibility ecclesially. However our actions will be judged on an individual level in regards to this.

Nobody would suggest that we are going to be commended for having a 'super righteous' brother in our fellowship group. Why can we then suggest this same principle in regards to error?

If there is a brother on the other side of the planet who is walking outside of the commands of Christ, where in Scripture can we go to prove that we will be held accountable for their sin? There are a few I used to use but when examined under the weight of the previous study we have undertaken they are extremely flimsy and the argument does not stack up. We hope to examine some of these now.

Verses used to support guilt by association - firstly taken from the Old Testament.:

Joshua 7v1-11

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel... And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up... Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.

This verse is often referred to as an example of guilt by association. Achan sins and *all* of Israel are held responsible. However Achan's sin doesn't prove guilt by association across a "fellowship". Firstly this is an example plucked from the Old Testament and applied,

The doctrine of the Pharisees

Believed in guilt-by-association: [John 9:1-34](#), [Luke 5:30](#), [15:2](#)

Added further, man-made, requirements to God's commands in their zeal to obey God:

[Matthew 15:4-6](#), [5:17-20](#), [Romans 10:2-3](#)

Made an outward show of following commands and looked down on others who did not follow them as they did: [Matthew 15:1-2](#), [Luke 18:9-14](#)

Focused on their ancestry & tradition, thinking that that would bring acceptance before God: [John 8:33](#), [Mark 7:5](#)

Puffed up and self-righteous: [Luke 18:9-14](#), [John 8:3-11](#), [Matt 23:23+27](#)

Tried to catch others in their own words: [Mark 12:13](#), [Luke 6:7](#), [11:53](#)

These doctrines spread like leaven which could influence others to also sin: [Matthew 16:6-12](#)

"...beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees..."

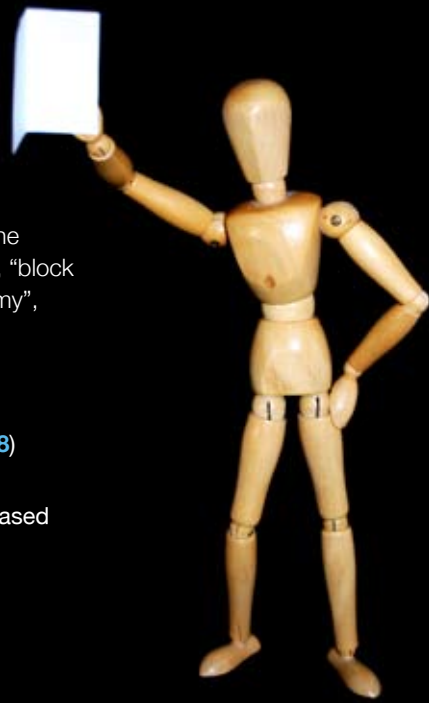
without question, to our set up in Christ. Are we sure we can do this? It also must be noted that Israel in the past is described as "the ecclesia in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38) - not the 'fellowship' in the wilderness. They were all in one location and we have seen that we do indeed have a responsibility to act within our ecclesias. Nobody was contending against Achan – even though it seems his sons and daughters may have known about his sin – (Joshua 7:24-25). It shows we have to deal with those in our ecclesia who walk not in accordance

Tips for Old Testament considerations

Examples from the Old Testament which appear on the surface to support the ideas of: “guilt by association”, “block dis-fellowship” and not adhering to “ecclesial autonomy”, need to be considered within the following principles:

1. Context, context context!
2. Israel are the ecclesia in the wilderness (**Acts 7:38**)
3. Israel are under a national covenant (**Exodus 24:3+7**) - acceptance before God was based upon national obedience

Considering the full scope of the Scripture is the key to getting a complete understanding.



with God’s word. This then is actually in harmony with ecclesial autonomy - e.g. each ecclesia needs to deal with its own issues.

Exodus 20:5

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

Is this guilt by association? Note the detail – it is only to those that “hate Him”. Consider Deut 24v16 “*The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.*” This shows that Exodus 20:5 can only mean “to those that hate” God otherwise there is a contradiction of Scripture. Ezekiel 18v14-20 also proves that everybody will be condemned for their own actions. “*The soul that sinneth IT shall die*” - not who it is associated with, not guilt by association.

Daniel 9:15 - 16

And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

This reference in Daniel is an example of a faithful follower who confesses the sins of the people of Israel as if they are his own. Other faithful men do this, such as Moses, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, etc. Is this guilt by association then? Are (or were) these faithful men of old guilty for the sins of others?

Well again, when we produce passages from the Old Testament we have to be very careful how we apply them. Firstly, Israel were under a national covenant. When their children were born they were circumcised

and became Jews without choice. Israel were under a national law (*Exodus 24:3+7*). They were - and are - judged, punished and rewarded on a national basis. Their acceptance before God is based upon national obedience. We are not under such a covenant. We are under individual covenants with God. Our children are not automatically Christadelphians - they must accept the Gospel and be baptized individually. We can see then that these faithful men of old who were under a national covenant were pleading on a national basis for the sin of the people - not on an individual one.

Also, as stated already, Israel were the “ecclesia in the wilderness” and therefore if we can take anything from these confessions it would be that we should be dealing with problems within our ecclesia. They cannot be applied as an example of guilt by association across different ecclesias in different localities simply because they call themselves Christadelphians.

We now move on to the New Testament and examine the so called “proof texts” for guilt by association there:

Revelation 2:14

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

This verse in the heart of the letters of Revelation is often highlighted as a verse which shows that within this ecclesia they were all guilty for the actions of some. This is a massive assumption - especially considering some of the other comments Christ gives

the faithful within the seven ecclesias which we hope to look at shortly. Again we see that as an ecclesia Christ had something against them and they, as an ecclesia, were to act upon this judgment. However it does not state that they were guilty for the actions of the other ecclesias - rather that they were guilty for not acting within their specific ecclesia.

1 Corinthians 5:6, 7

Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven...

The argument used here is that there is sin in a fellowship, and that all members of the fellowship become guilty of the sin by being associated with it. This guilt spreads like leaven - making the whole lump guilty. A far more Scriptural and logical interpretation of this passage is that it is not talking about contamination but rather the influence of a wrong action. That is why you cut it out, because you could be influenced by it – not that you would be guilty of it. Also again this cannot be used as proof that guilt spreads across a fellowship group. Paul is speaking to a specific ecclesia and is not referring to issues in other ecclesias. There is no place in Scripture that a group of ecclesias are considered guilty for associating with one ecclesia which contains error. Surely there would be examples of this if it was such a massive doctrine that affects our standing before God?

Individual and ecclesial responsibility

So if guilt by association is not a real Scriptural concept, what does the Bible teach concerning responsibility? Well, as we have seen we all have an individual and ecclesial responsibility to ensure that the Gospel is upheld and that the influence of error of walk is removed so as not to influence others to sin. Let's have a look at some specific examples:

Revelation 2:18-25

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her 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; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. 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. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

This is not the place for a full exposition of this passage, however if we look at this letter to the Thyatira ecclesia in the light of the study we are undertaking we can see some very

...we are not guilty for the actions of others but for our individual actions.

“ ”

important things. Firstly here we have the Lord Jesus Christ himself operating under the principles of ecclesial autonomy as already mentioned. He addresses each ecclesia individually as a single unit. He doesn't tell one ecclesia (an example we made earlier was the Philadelphia ecclesia who is not condemned) to sort out the problems of another or to cut off the "wayward" ones. If autonomy was wrong and all the members of each ecclesia are guilty for the actions of each other, surely just one letter would have been written to "the whole fellowship. Instead an individual letter was written to each individual ecclesia. The same goes with the apostle Paul. He wrote to the individual ecclesias about the problems within them. Again, this supports ecclesial autonomy. Individual ecclesias are individually responsible for their members.

So the principle of ecclesial independence is here being promoted. The next thing to note is that even within an ecclesia not all members are painted with the same brush. The Lord had a problem with the Thyatira ecclesia because there were members who held the doctrine of Jezebel. However other members of the ecclesia were not guilty by associating with those in error because we later read that there were some who were to rule over the nations and receive the "morning star" - a symbol of entering the Kingdom! It is clear that these faithful brothers and sisters were contending against those who held this error because the Master says that he would

send them "none other burden". So clearly then, we are not even guilty by associating with error of practice within an ecclesia if we are contending against it - let alone being guilty for error that has developed in an ecclesia far away from us. What was this ecclesia to do with those who practiced the evils of Jezebel? They were not to "suffer" them (Strong's; "to allow one to do as he wishes, not to restrain, to let alone") and were to continue to contend against them.

Again we see that we do have an ecclesial responsibility and we are not guilty for the actions of others but for our individual actions.

Revelation 3:1-5

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. 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. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Once more we see the same principles shining through. This ecclesia has a stinging criticism leveled at it by the righteous judge, the Lord Jesus. They were not walking as members of Christ's body should be. They are told to repent. However if you look closely you will see that not all of the ecclesia fall into this category as we would

expect to be the case if 'guilt by association' was a real Scriptural principle. Some will be "clothed in white raiment" and will have their names in the "book of life". Clearly guilt by association is not something which is here! This is not us reading our own ideas into the text - this is plain and obvious.

Romans 14:1+10-13

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations... For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

So weak brethren should be accepted in the ecclesia as long as they are in "in the faith" (i.e. the Gospel) and we won't be judged for what others are doing. We will each have an individual judgment and have to give an individual account. There is nothing here, or anywhere in Scripture, about being judged for what *others* do.

We mustn't put stumbling blocks in the way of others - we must be careful therefore what we impose upon our fellow brothers and sisters as additional conditions (outside of the Gospel) for fellowship.

1 Corinthians 11:29

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself...

This verse shows us we have a personal responsibility in the breaking of bread.

There really is nothing Scripturally to suggest that we are all guilty for what each of us are

doing throughout the body of Christ. Although we have a responsibility to our brothers and sisters, especially to our own ecclesia, we will not be judged for the actions of others.

Take *Genesis 3:9-19* for example. This is the first place God's judgment is revealed. Adam & Eve both sinned & tried to blame each other, but God addressed them as individuals. He addressed Adam, and condemned Adam for what Adam did. He then addressed Eve, & condemned her for what she did. They were given different punishments for their different sins. Individually they had to give an account of what they did and this is the example and principle of God's judgment that goes throughout the whole of Scripture – that we are individually responsible for what we do, not who we are associated with, and as in the account in *Genesis*, we are not even guilty for what our husband or wife does.

This shows that God isn't going to cast us out because we remain strong amongst error. We will not be saved for what someone else has done - therefore we will not be condemned for what others do. We have to give an account individually for what we have done, not for others.

Another example we could quote is the plain teaching that there was always a "remnant" in Israel. This shows that not all Israel were contaminated



Block dis-fellowship

"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not...and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and **forbiddeth them that would**, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." **3 John 9-11**

by the others who had gone astray.

We could go on and on and quote reference after reference of people being judged worthy of a place in God's Kingdom who associated with, but contended against, error.

The idea of block disfellowship

Based very much on the concept of guilt by association comes the idea of block dis-fellowship. The idea is that you do not just withdraw from the brother/sister who is in error – but also from everyone else who receives him/her. So is this Scriptural? Well we have seen that we have to remain apart from unbelievers. In a sense all Christadelphians "block dis-fellowship" themselves from anyone who does not believe the Gospel. However should we apply this principle to other matters which occur within the body of Christ? Should we apply this to matters which fall outside the Gospel? Instead of simply "avoiding" those walking in error should we officially cut them off and any who would have them?

There is only one example of block dis-fellowship we find in the Scriptures and it is termed by John as "evil" - or if you look this word up in Strong's it can be translated "wicked".

3 John 9-11

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is

of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

Here we see that Diotrephes was condemned for block dis-fellowship! John is refused by Diotrophes who also withdraws from others who fellowship John.

Withdrawal from a brother/sister in error is correct - but, not all those that associate with him/her. Withdrawal wholesale is not found in Scripture. The challenge really should be to disprove this. If we believe a brother is walking in error we can avoid (withdraw) ourselves from him – we shouldn't do the same to all those who accept him. Our "fellowship" is in the Gospel.

Galatians 2:11-14

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

So Peter withdraws himself from the Gentiles with some other Jews. By doing this Paul comments that they were not walking according to "the Gospel". Why? They were adding to the Gospel as a basis of fellowship. Peter is withstood by Paul because of this.

1 Corinthians 1:13

Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

There is only one body as we have seen

from our studies already. How can we refuse fellowship to others who have been called by God through the Gospel? How can we refuse to recognise fellowship where God grants it?

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

We see here that divisions are not good and are following fleshly instincts. This shows that trying to impose certain things on others for fellowship, which causes divisions, is a product of the fleshly mind. Subjects and conclusions based upon a deeper understanding from outside the Gospel can become knowledge which “puffeth up” (*1 Corinthians 8:1*). We have to be careful that we are not being “puffed up” with insisting these views are adopted by others and thus causing divisions. The division has been made by God himself - e.g. those in the “body” through belief and baptism and those outside of it.

Conclusion

So we have gone through the Scriptures and looked at the principles of Biblical fellowship.

In Part 1 we saw that it is the message of the Gospel and baptism into Christ which calls us all from the world.

We then saw in Part 2 that everyone who has been called in this way makes up the household of God and the “one body”.

This body is made up of individuals grouped into ecclesias and they are “in fellowship” or have a “common sharing” in the Gospel as summarized in the BASF.

There are two parts of our walk in the Truth.

- 1 - There is our belief in the Gospel – which is our faith. Belief in the Gospel is necessary for fellowship (a common sharing) with others.
- 2 - There is our obedience to the commands – which is our way of life / our walk. Belief in the Gospel (our faith) PLUS our obedience to the commands (our walk) – are necessary for salvation.

We must take care that in our zeal to follow Christ we do not mix the two up in regards to what we impose on our fellow believers.

We noted that the individual’s responsibility was to their ecclesia. We noted that first principle error was not to be tolerated within the ecclesia and separation from unbelievers was an important principle. We noted that where matters of practice occur which are not in accordance with the commands of Christ, avoidance of the offender should take place - ecclesially and individually. We saw though that these matters are treated very differently to matters of doctrine as the one withdrawn

from is still a brother or sister of Christ. We considered that what one ecclesia found acceptable another might not but that these differences were not on first principles and so would be left for Christ to ultimately judge. We noted that guilt by association and block dis-fellowship are not Scriptural principles. We noted that even if error is practiced we could remain amongst this error and yet could still be acceptable to God - if we are contending against it and if the influence of that error was not causing us to sin.

In our studies we saw no Scriptural basis for setting up a “new fellowship” or for blocking off those who hold the same core doctrines as ourselves.

In all of our considerations we have attempted to give a fair and balanced review of the verses which deal directly with this subject.

It might be worth saying that problems and issues that spring up from within the brotherhood are God sent.

We can see that by reading:

1 Corinthians 11:19

For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

So there “must” be heresies among us but they are there so that we can be approved. It is how we deal with error which is the mechanism for this approval. We must not only contend against error but should expect it. This of course is an Old Testament principle:

Deuteronomy 13:1-3

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake

unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

We have seen in our studies that we are all one body based upon the Gospel (1 Corinthians 12). If we cut ourselves off from that body then these words have little or no effect.

There will be problems ecclesially. We *will* have to contend and deal with error - however there are also great benefits if we base our actions on the Scriptural principles of fellowship.

We have focused very much on the negative side of the principles of our common sharing. This was inevitable because of the great difference of view on these principles. However there are marvellous and wonderful benefits. Ultimately fellowship is not a negative subject but a positive one.

Galatians 3:22-29

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Here is the definition of brothers and sisters in Christ. Here we see that all are one in Christ

Jesus - the one body. How sad it is that this body has been divided. How sad it is that some cannot recognise their fellow brethren.

Many, like me, set out to find the "perfect fellowship". It is only by examining the Scriptures that we find that in the time before the Lord returns we will not find such a group of individuals, for wherever human nature is - error cannot be far away. There has only ever been one who has resisted sin in the flesh - our Lord Jesus Christ and it is through his great victory over it that we have the opportunity to find a place in his "multitudinous body" at his return. It is only at that time when in God's mercy we will have our vile bodies changed and made like unto his glorious body - that we will truly find the true fellowship that we desperately long for.

My personal appeal is that as we await that time, we turn aside from traditions and rules of man and hear what the Scriptures say to us. That we remove all natural pride and we join to support and be supported by all those who have been called by the Gospel. Yes, there will be problems which will need to be contended against. Yes, it might take a while to adjust - but if we prayerfully set our path on the foundation of the Scriptures we can trust that God will be with us. We all have a part to play in the one body. Are you doing yours?

I hope this study has been useful to you dearest reader and that God has been glorified in all that has been written here.

May our Lord soon return to bring us into that glorious multitude of the redeemed. Amen.

Bro Matt Davies | **Nottingham**

Further study

🕒 True Principles & Uncertain Details

(The danger of going too far in demands on fellow believers)
The Christadelphian 1898 / Vol 35 / page 182

[Bro Robert Roberts](#)

🕒 A guide to the Formation & Conduct of Ecclesias

[Bro Robert Roberts](#)

🕒 Anastasis - Preface

[Bro John Thomas](#)

🕒 Fellowship in the Truth

The Christadelphian 1870 / Vol.7 / page 16

[Bro John Thomas](#)



Special thanks to:

Bro Chris Boyes

Bro Gareth & Sis Jane Davies

Sis Christine Leadill

Bro Neil & Sis Hannah Hines

Sis Ruth Davies

Published by:

M Davies

35 Highfield Drive

Carlton

Nottingham

NG4 1JQ