**…………Front Cover…………**

**Christadelphian**

**Fellowship**

Matthew 18

And

The Traditions of Men

**…………………..Back Cover…………………..**

**A Statement of Doctrines Forming Our Basis of Fellowship**

**The Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith**

Truth to Be Received

Doctrines to Be Rejected

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1. Divorce and Remarriage

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**Matthew 18:15-17**

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

**Mark 7:7** *“Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men”*.

Non-scriptural traditions must never be permitted to disannul the scriptural command of Matthew 18:15-17.

**…………Foreword……….**

*“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find the faith on the earth”* (Luke 18:8)?

From its inception, Christadelphians have struggled to maintain the purity of the Truth. In 1859 Brother Roberts William Tudor who claimed that Israel had no further part in God’s plan. In 1866 he opposed the view of John Dowie who attempted to introduce the view of the present possession of the Holy Spirit along with a variety of other errors. In 1873 he opposed Edward Turney and David Hadley who introduced the clean flesh theory.

Christadelphians of course separated from all of these false views recognizing that if they did not the Truth would be lost. Today is no different. And separation from false doctrine and practice is no easier now than it was in Brother Roberts’ day. This little booklet attempts to bring before the body some things to consider as we await the Masters return. **The entire booklet can be freely obtained** by going to the following link and then clicking on, *“Christadelphian Fellowship.”* <http://thenewworldorder.org/site/booklets.htm>

For further information or if you would like some printed booklets, please **email us**at,

[www.TheNewWorldOrder.org/site/contact-us.htm](http://thenewworldorder.org/site/contact-us.htm)

In the hope of Israel,

Calvin Yutzy

April 2014

(Slightly revised Dec 2016)

**A Sound Christadelphian Fellowship Position**

A sound fellowship position is essential if one is to have a sound fellowship. Without a sound fellowship position an ecclesia is rudderless and will float wherever the current takes it.

Therefore, all Christadelphians have taken a fellowship position through their *Statement of Faith* and so understand that saying “the Bible is our standard,” is insufficient. This is true even though our fellowship positions in some instances are significantly different in the different fellowships.

Having a sound scriptural fellowship position of course does not guarantee a sound fellowship, but without it we cannot maintain one. A sound scriptural fellowship position must therefore be our starting point.

Brother Roberts recognized this and developed the *Birmingham Statement of Faith*, the BSF, in the late 1800s. This was later amended to what we now have as the *Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith*, the BASF. This amendment is a clarification of Rule 24 (see the Addendum). Some have retained the original BSF and their position is now called the *Birmingham Unamended Statement of Faith,* the BUSF. They are also called the Advocates.

We are of the Amended group and so adhere to the BASF; however, since it was established a little more than 100 years ago a number of errors have crept into the body, requiring some of us to add to this wonderfully sound, yet now incomplete, document.

Following is what we believe to be a sound scriptural fellowship position.

**Christadelphians**

**(Committed to Upholding the Apostolic Faith)**

**A Statement of Doctrines**

**Forming Our Basis of Fellowship**

**The Birmingham Amended Statement Of Faith**

Truth to Be Received

Commandments of Christ

Doctrines to Be Rejected

**Addendum**

**1.** **Divorce and Remarriage**

**a.** A brother or sister may not obtain a divorce for any cause. **Matt. 19:3-6; Mark 10:7-12; 1 Cor. 7:10-11; 1 Cor. 7:27.**

**b**. A brother or sister who, for any cause, has become divorced after baptism may not take a new mate during the lifetime of any former partner. **1 Cor. 7:10-11; 1 Cor. 7:39; Rom 7:2.**

**c.** An applicant for immersion who is married at the time of application for baptism will be accepted into fellowship unconditionally (without regard to former marriage or divorce) after a good confession of faith.  **1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Cor. 7:24**.

**d.** A divorced man or woman coming to the knowledge of "the truth" and being immersed may not remarry while any former partner lives. **Rom 7:3; 1 Cor. 7:39.**

**2. Sisters**

**a.** That there is a general brother-sister distinction that requires sisters to learn in silence with all subjection, and not to teach nor usurp authority over the man.

**1 Tim 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 11:7-9.**

**b.** That sisters should wear hats during all officially called gatherings of the Ecclesia, which is an acknowledgment of this subjection, and affirms that “the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."

**1 Cor. 11:3-16**.

**c.** That the sister is commanded to silence in the churches. **1 Cor. 14:34-40**. That in harmony with 1 Tim Chapter 2, and 1 Cor. Chapter 11, mentioned above, along with the entire scriptural pattern, no one can prove that this required silence does not include ALL officially called gatherings of the Ecclesia (during the time that the Truth is being preached, taught, expounded, or the business of the Truth is being conducted); that to teach otherwise is error.

**3. Miscellaneous**

Homosexuality, suing at law, and jury duty are opposed to the laws of God. The Holy Spirit gifts are not possessed today. **1Cor. 6:7-10; Rom 12:18-19; Eph. 2:11-13, 19; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Cor. 13: 19-13.**

**4. Fellowship**

We will not fellowship any who hold or practice a contrary view, or who, although themselves not holding or practicing a contrary view, are prepared to fellowship those who do. **1Cor 5:4-13; 2 Thes 3:6; 2 Jo 10; Eph 5:11; Titus 3:10; Matt 18:15-17.**

**5. The Bible**

The Bible is our ultimate guide and arbiter. If errors arise, we will add to our fellowship position as needed. **Isa 8:20; Gal 1:7; 1 Jo 5:3.**

**……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….**

Not part of our *Basis of Fellowship* but worthy of consideration is,

***“What should be done if a Brother or Sister does get Divorced and Remarried?”***

Since divorce and remarriage has been so problematic to the Christadelphian body over the years it will be profitable to consider *A Guide* that one Ecclesia has adopted:

***“A brother or sister who becomes divorced and then gets remarried is in violation of the scriptures and will be admitted into fellowship after they have permanently separated from their present spouse (a careful examination of the circumstances should be made to ascertain that the separation is stable and permanent), have accepted our Four Points on Divorce and Remarriage, acknowledge that their remarriage was an unscriptural adulterous union, and ask forgiveness from God. The examination will also cover any other areas of concern. Luke 16:18; Gal. 5:19; Prov. 28:13.***

*“(****Luke 16:18 “****Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”*

***Gal 5:19 “****Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery… they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

***Prov 28:13*** *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy”).”*

A divorced and remarried Christadelphian who has fully met these guidelines has already been admitted into fellowship.

**Fellowship**

The main foundational *fellowship* document for Christadelphians is Brother Roberts’ original *Birmingham Statement of Faith,* the BSF. Attached to the BSF but separate from it are two other sections called *The Commandments of Christ* and *Doctrines to be Rejected*.

In 1898 some brethren determined that Rule 24 in the BSF, relating to who was responsible to the judgment seat of Christ, was inadequate and so amended this single rule (see the Addendum). This new amended document became known as the *Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith*, the BASF. This was a doctrinal amendment so that those who did not accept this amendment were not in fellowship with those who did. (Some ecclesias in these two groups have recently begun a reunification process).

Most Christadelphians today use the BASF as their Statement of Faith and so are the *Amended Christadelphians.* Sometimes additional clauses are added, as for example in our above *Statement of Faith* shown on pages 1- 2. We have titled it *A Statement of Doctrines Forming Our Basis of Fellowship.*  As stated, this document forms *our basis of fellowship* and includes the BASF with some additional clauses, including the *Commandments of Christ,* *Doctrines to Be Rejected*, and an *Addendum.*

These documents, either the BUSF for the Unamended or the BASF for the Amended are the main documents establishing the fellowship positions of Christadelphians. Thus when Brother Roberts’ original BSF was amended to the BASF, it was *a doctrinal amendment;* some will argue that it was only a doctrinal *clarification,* but either way it caused a split in the fellowship.

Since we have adopted the BASF, our arguments herein will be related mainly to this group, although most would apply equally to the BUSF.

Those of us who have accepted the fellowship position given on pages 1-2 are in our fellowship and recognize a mutual responsibility to one another.

This is not to say that any Christadelphian fellowship (including our own) can say who in their fellowship are in fellowship with the Father. Our present use of the term fellowship is a practical one indicating those baptized believers affirming the same Statement of Faith. This is true of all Christadelphians, whatever their fellowship position.

The apostle John, through the Spirit, gives us useful information on fellowship. 1Jo 1:3 *“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…7 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.”*

We see that this fellowship is conditioned on “walking in the light.” And we are unable in this present state to determine who is in this fellowship with the Father. Some of us now, whatever our fellowship position, may be in fellowship with the Father and His son and some may not. We are told that on the Day of Judgment *“many”* will argue that they have this fellowship and should be accepted by Christ only to have him tell them that he never knew them (Matt 7:22-23). Only when Christ has selected his Bride will we know for sure who truly has fellowship with the Father and His son and only then will that perfected fellowship be formed.

We can, however, at this present time establish a sound fellowship position based on the light and commit ourselves to walking therein, and we can also assist all of our brothers and sisters who have joined with us in this fellowship position in their walk. Committing ourselves to the scriptural implementation of Matthew 18 is a crucial part of this work as we will later discuss.

There are three main documents that we will be considering that have originated from Brother Roberts in the late 1800s.

1. *The Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith,* the BASF. This has to do with *doctrine* and so has fellowship implications.
2. *The Birmingham Constitution* relates generally to the structure and procedures of an ecclesia and so is generally *non-doctrinal,* although it may have doctrinal implications. Some aspects do relate to doctrinal issues, such as Rule 31, which directs us to follow the command of Matthew 18.
3. *The Ecclesial Guide* also relates generally to the structure and procedures of an ecclesia. It is also generally *non-doctrinal* but may have doctrinal implications.

Our Ecclesial *Constitutions* are a set of principles that states how the ecclesia is to be *constituted* or governed. Today our constitutions are often based on the Birmingham Constitution but frequently differ in a number of ways. For example, a small ecclesia would have a smaller number of speakers, presiders, visiting brethren, etc., than a larger ecclesia. The different times and conditions in which we live also require changes from the Birmingham Constitution and since it is not a doctrinal document this can be done by a vote of the ecclesia without affecting our fellowship.

It is important to keep in mind which ecclesial documents are *doctrinal* and which are *non-doctrinal,* since *doctrinal* positions affect our fellowship position whereas *non-doctrinal* positions do not. Our *Statement of Faith* is our main *doctrinal* document. Our *Constitution* and the *Ecclesial Guide* are primarily *non-doctrinal* and so aremainly for our guidance in running our ecclesias.

**Matthew 18 and Fellowship**

**Matthew 18:15-17** commands:

*“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.”*

Matthew 18 is Christ’s method for assisting brethren who have fallen short, and is also his means for keeping the body free from accepted sin. If this command is not followed, every form of sin will result and eventually become accepted within a fellowship.

**Some Sins That Have Been Accepted Within the Brotherhood**

Sadly the refusal to follow Matthew 18 and the acceptance of sin within the brotherhood has occurred. Some sins that have entered the body are:

* *Belief in evolution,*
* *the “clean flesh” view* [the view that Christ was in some way born with “clean flesh, different from ours]*,*
* *the present possession of the Holy Spirit,*
* *partial inspiration of the Scripture,*
* *immortal emergence in resurrection,*
* *the Kingdom of God is in the heart now,*
* *baptism is important but not essential*

(*The Old Paths Magazine* November 1977, page 301).

As far as I know, from 1977 to the present, this statement has never been refuted. Also, over the years since this was published there have been a number of Christadelphian articles acknowledging and condemning many of these same sins within the body, thus verifying that they are present and remain.

*Divorce and remarriage* by brothers and sisters,

not mentioned above, is also permitted within some fellowships of the Christadelphian body.

Since this issue has been so problematic over the years, we will give two quotes to consider.

1) *“Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.* 12 *And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery* (Mark 10:11-12) and,

2) *“Adultery…they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”* (Gal 5:19-21).

These two quotes are in full harmony with our above Fellowship Position on pages 1-2 and need to be harmonized with any fellowship position.

These accepted sins within the body are the logical and inevitable outcome for those who do not insist on following the scriptural command of Matthew 18. None of these above-mentioned sins would have taken root within the body if Matthew 18 had been properly followed. I say that these sins are *“accepted”* because they are tolerated or *permitted to remain*. Some brothers and sisters may be highly distressed by these sins, yet if they do not follow the command of Matthew 18 and correct them, or remove them, they ultimately “accept” them within their midst.

Once a fellowship begins to ignore the command of Matthew 18 every form of sin will take root. It is progressive and unstoppable. Rejecting the literal requirements of Matthew 18 and embracing sin within the fellowship go hand in hand. They are cause and effect. And each and every brother and sister has a duty to see that sin is never accepted within their ecclesia or fellowship.

It may seem surprising to some, yet some brothers and sisters that are in fellowship with the sins mentioned above *understand that they are sins.* They nevertheless accept these sins within their midst through their refusal to submit to the command of Matthew 18.

Some ecclesias in the Apostle John’s time were condemned by Christ for retaining within their midst the Balaamites, the Nicolaitans and the Jezebels (Rev 2). From this class developed the Great Whore, who when John saw after about 2000 years of development *“wondered with great astonishment”* (Rev 17:6). From the chaste Bride of Christ had developed this murderous monstrosity of evil. And this development took place one sin at a time—often because faithful brethren were lacking who would implement Matthew 18.

If Matthew 18 was properly followed with any sin, the brother would either put away his sin or he would be withdrawn from. Either way, we would not have this sin remaining within the body.

The refusal to follow the command that Christ has given us in Matthew 18 is to accept sin within the body. Conversely, if Matthew 18 is followed as given by Christ, it will keep the body free from *accepted* sin.

We are our brother’s keeper and should we see sin within our fellowship we must, in love for our brother, and in faithfulness to our Master, either correct the sin or remove it by following his command in Matthew 18:15-17.

It should be noted that we are not saying that any of us are free from sin! All of us all too frequently “miss the mark” and sin. This however has nothing to do with *accepting* the sin and permitting it to remain. We thus all need to daily pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” As we have sins and failings, so too does each and every one of our brothers and sisters. We must therefore, within ourselves and within our fellowship, commit ourselves to overcoming our failings. We must never, within ourselves or within our fellowship, *accept* sin as a way of life. Sin must never become the accepted standard for our fellowship position. If we, or any in our fellowship, lapse into accepting sin as a way of life, either in faith or practice, Matthew 18 must be insisted upon so that the sin is put away or the sinner is removed from fellowship so that the sin never becomes accepted within the body and so be permitted to remain*.*

We must forgive those who trespass against us if we expect to be forgiven; nevertheless, we have no ability to forgive sins against God. If a brother or sister is trespassing God’s commands, we must correct them through the proper use of Matthew 18. Let us consider Matthew 18 in a little more detail.

**Step 1:** *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* (v.15).

Here we see a brother who has in some way trespassed (as far as we can tell). In love to him, and in obedience to our Master, we privately speak to him about this matter; If he is in fact in trespass, and if he does harken, we have gained our brother, having converted the sinner from the error of his way and saved a soul from death (James 5:20).

The words *“against thee,”* as given in the KJV should be omitted, see the *Diaglott*, The *New English Bible*, etc. The sin therefore is not restricted to those sins *against us* *individually.* Any trespass against the laws of God must be corrected by the use of Matthew 18.

***Step 2:*** *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* (v. 16).

We are not permitted to drop the matter after the first step if it has not been properly resolved. We must continue our attempt to correct the matter. The two or three witnesses open up the matter to a broader audience and help establish the facts of the case.

***Step 3:*** *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church* (v. 17).

If he rejects step 2, we must bring the matter before the body of called out ones. Notice that at each step of the way our brother has the opportunity to acknowledge his trespass and put it away. At this step, with the weight of the entire body of called out ones, he is again given that opportunity.

**Step 4:** *but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican* (v. 17).

Should the brother reject the counsel of the body of called out ones, he must be put out of the camp as a common Gentile. At this point, without the camp, he is left to God’s judgment—“*But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person”* (1Co 5:13).

We sometimes find Christadelphians who disregard Step 4 and so do not remove their fellowship from the sinner as commanded. But in rejecting this they reject a main theme that goes throughout the whole of the Scriptures, from Cain onward. Sin must never be accepted. Some scriptures showing this from the New Testament are,

**Matt 18:17** *If he neglect to hear the church,* ***let him be unto thee as an heathen man*** *and a publican.*

**1 Cor. 5:6** *Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?* 7***Purge out*** *therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump…* 12 *For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?* 13 *But them that are without* *God judgeth. Therefore* ***put away*** *from among yourselves that wicked person.*

**2 Thes 3:6** 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.*

**2 Jo 1:10** If *there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine****, receive him not*** *into your house, neither bid him God speed:* 11 *For he that biddeth him God speed is* ***partaker of his evil deeds****.*

**Eph 5:3** *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;* 4 *Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.* 5 *For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* 6 *Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.* 7 *Be* ***not ye therefore partakers with them.***

Brother Roberts’ instructions on how to keep the body free from accepted sin are in full harmony with this. He says: *“The apostolic rule is to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and from those who teach heresy–without reference to the question of what the Lord may finally think of them. And the rule is defensive in its bearing…The time for withdrawal is when men drift into unscriptural attitudes of* ***faith or practice****…unless we observe this apostolically prescribed scrupulosity, the Truth would soon be suffocated and disappear…we are not at liberty to relax the appointments of God…”* (Emphasis mine; Quoted from *The Berean Christadelphian* Oct. 1981).

**Avoiding the Command of Matthew 18**

As we all know from experience, the wickedness within our flesh is ever ready to deceive us. Our fleshly tendency is to disregard the commands of God and to indulge in our own desires—Gen 3:1, *“The serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field.”* Jer. 17:9, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”* Ro 7:18, *“I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing,”* etc.

There are a number of arguments, based on man-made traditions, that have been used to avoid following that plain command of Matthew 18. These include, The BASF, Ecclesial Autonomy, Block Dis-Fellowship, A Walk and Conduct and We All Sin. We will consider each of these. First,

**The BASF**

The *Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith* is a wonderfully sound document that has stood the test of time for over 100 years and is still the primary *Statement of Faith* for most Christadelphians today. However, as can be seen on pages 4-5, this document has not been enough to keep at bay a number of sins that have crept into the body. It was good for the 1800s and is good as a foundation even today, but a foundation is not an edifice. To say that we will never confront any sin by using Matthew 18 unless it is mentioned in the BASF, a document made over 100 years ago, is not wise. Yea it is a specific violation of God’s command in Matthew 18:15, “*If your brother commits a sin, go and take the matter up with him, strictly between yourselves…”* (NEB).

**Ecclesial Autonomy**

Another way that some brothers and sisters avoid implementing the ***command*** ***of God*** in Matthew 18 is by invoking the ***tradition of man*** in “ecclesial autonomy.”

The concept of *ecclesial autonomy*, or as it is sometimes called, *ecclesial independence*, was introduced by Brother Roberts in his *Ecclesial Guide*, item 42 under, *“Ecclesias In Relation To One Another.”* Ecclesial autonomy says that each ecclesia in a fellowship is autonomous and should decide for itself how to run its own ecclesia and another ecclesia within that fellowship should not dictate what positions they should or should not hold within their own ecclesia. That is, each ecclesia is autonomous and independent with regard to the decisions that it makes for itself. Brother Roberts says, for example in the *Ecclesial Guide,* *“There ought to be no interference of one ecclesia with another”, “Ecclesial independence is a principle essential to be maintained”, and “This is the independence not to be interfered with.”* He also included this thought in the *Birmingham Constitution*, Clause #35, but when questioned on it, acknowledged that this procedure regarding ecclesial autonomy was “imperfect” (*The Christadelphian,* 1887). We will discuss this imperfection later.

There are three main ways that ecclesial autonomy has been interpreted.

**Interpretation 1:** *Ecclesial autonomy only applies to the implementation of non-doctrinal* ***procedures*** *within ecclesia, such as how many hymns should be sung during a Memorial Meeting.*

We believe that this position is acceptable and that it needs no further explanation.

**Interpretation 2:** *If two ecclesias in a fellowship disagree about the “facts” concerning a particular brother in regards to his “personal actions or character” and one ecclesia dis-fellowships him and the other does not, they should agree to disagree and not break up their fellowship over this*.

*This is the position that Brother Roberts argued for in his Ecclesial Guide* and in the *Birmingham Constitution.*

For example, let us assume that a fellowship acknowledges that a drunkard cannot enter the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21). One brother, in step three of Matthew 18, is brought before the ecclesia for being a drunkard. The ecclesia examines the facts of the case and determines that they should not withdraw their fellowship from the brother. Another ecclesia in the same fellowship examines the same set of facts, finds him to be a drunkard and withdraws their fellowship from him. Thus we have two ecclesias in fellowship with one another, disagreeing about the “facts” of this particular case. One ecclesia is fellowshipping him and another ecclesia in the same fellowship is not fellowshipping him. Brother Roberts says that in this instance the two ecclesias should remain in fellowship with one another agreeing to disagree, under the rule of ecclesial autonomy.

His view was that where principles of the Truth were accepted, a fellowship should not be broken up over the disagreement of certain “facts” about “perhaps some unworthy person.”

There was apparently some concern regarding this view even in his time since he felt the need to clarify what he meant in 1897. He said:

*“Rule 35 of the Birmingham Constitution has no reference to cases where first principles are in question. The rule relates solely to disputed questions of* ***personal action and character,*** *as to which it is possible for even 2 men to be righteously disagreed in their opinion concerning a third person”* [*The Christadelphian* April 1887; quoted from *The Berean Christadelphian,* January 2000; emphasis mine].

The problem is that by implementing this view one destroys the meaning of fellowship. One ecclesia would be in fellowship with the brother and another ecclesia in the same fellowship would not be in fellowship with this same brother and yet the two ecclesias would be in fellowship with each other. This is not fellowship. When implemented in this way it destroys the meaning of fellowship.

It also causes a number of personal, structural and fellowship problems when the two ecclesias get together, such as during a fraternal gathering, a Sunday School program, etc. When the brother who is in fellowship with one ecclesia and out of fellowship with another ecclesia arrives at a fraternal gathering, what is to be done at the Memorial Meeting? In Brother Roberts’ day this was not a significant problem since traveling to and from these events was not commonly done due to the impracticability of travel. Today it is different. Now we think nothing of going hundreds or even thousands of miles for a fraternal. It is now common for different ecclesias within a fellowship to get together, often several times a year.

Thus, even though this interpretation is not letting a brother or sister with some doctrinal error be retained in the fellowship—*“The rule relates solely to disputed questions of personal action and character”* and “*has no reference to cases where first principles are in question”—*it stumbles into a different error. That of fellowship.

This is a mistaken view and if implemented as described will destroy the meaning of fellowship.

In addition, this view, which is restricted to “personal actions and character”, can easily be relaxed to include doctrinal matters, as we will see in…

**Interpretation 3:** *If one ecclesia in a fellowship accepts a brother who either in faith or practice accepts one or more of the sins mentioned on pages 4-5, or some other erroneous doctrinal matter, and another ecclesia believes the brother and the ecclesia that accepts him is in error, they should not break up their fellowship over this.*

Unfortunately fellowships that take this point of view on *ecclesial autonomy*, in addition to having a wrong view of fellowship, additionally allow various sins to be accepted into the body.

Here is an example of what can occur. One ecclesia in the fellowship may permit brothers and sisters into their ecclesia who believe or practice one or more of the various sins listed on pages 4-5. Some members perhaps even argue that these sins are wholly scriptural.

Other brothers and sisters in another Ecclesia within the same fellowship may strongly believe some or all of these items are sins. They however absolve themselves from the responsibility of following Matthew 18:15-17 and correcting these sins by proclaiming, *“ecclesial autonomy.”* “The brother who teaches or practices this sin,” they say, “is not in my ecclesia and so I cannot approach him on a Matthew 18 or I will be violating the rule of *ecclesial autonomy*.” “I cannot,” they say, “interfere in the workings of another ecclesia.”

Let us consider “Corban” in Christ’s day in relationship to this misuse of the term *ecclesial autonomy* in our day.

**Mark 7:6-13** Jesus *“answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* 7 *Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* 8  *For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.* 9 *And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.* 10 *For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:* 11 *But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free.* 12 *And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;* 13 *Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.”*

In this instance some Jews were dedicating a portion of their money to the synagogue and then saying, “This money is dedicated to God and so is not available for the welfare of my parents.” With this reasoning they were not properly supporting their parents. They were saying “Corban” (*a gift*) and so annulling the command to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12). Jesus called them “hypocrites,” saying, “This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines *the* *commandments of men.* For laying aside*the* ***commandment of******God****,*ye hold the ***tradition of men****.”*

Could we not equally say this of those who say *“ecclesial autonomy”* so as to keep in fellowship a known sinner? Do they not hold to the***tradition*** of *ecclesial autonomy* and refuse the ***command*** of Matthew 18? Do they not “Corbanize” a sin, making the word of God of none effect through their traditions?

Is this not a Corban-like excuse to say, “We do not allow a brother who is in our fellowship who is a known sinner in doctrine or practice to break bread in our ecclesia, but he can remain in our fellowship as long as he stays in another ecclesia”? And of course they will break bread with all those in this other ecclesia, who in turn break bread with this offender. They are thus “in fellowship” with these sinners, but their accepted ***“tradition”*** does not permit them to correct the sin by following the ***“command”*** of Matthew 18:15-17.

Known sinners are thus permitted in their fellowship under this erroneous interpretation of “ecclesial autonomy.”

This view adds to the error of interpretation #2 by not only destroyingthe meaning of fellowship, but also the purity of the truth. Sin is permitted to exist within their fellowship.

A distinction is thus made between an ecclesia and a fellowship. Most Christadelphian fellowships rightly speak against the acceptance of sin within their *ecclesial* midst as shown from the following comment on Nehemiah 13:7. As we read this, let us keep in mind that Nehemiah was coming from his own ecclesia in Persia hundreds of miles away to the ecclesia of Jerusalem.

*“And I* [Nehemiah] *came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.”*

Here Eliashib was the high priest and Tobiah was an Ammonite. Nehemiah therefore cast out all of Tobiah’s stuff from the chamber and had it cleansed. The *Christadelphian Expositor* comments on this passage as follows, *“Eliashib was held responsible for the actions of Tobiah that he had permitted. Similarly, if brethren allow toleration, doctrinal error, or worldly influence into ecclesial activities, they will be held personally responsible.”*

Christadelphians in most fellowships would give this statement a hardy, “Amen”. They agree that such toleration of error into *“ecclesial”*activities is wholly unacceptable, and yet some of these same ecclesias tolerate similar errors within their *fellowships.* Is it not fair to say that they *“similarly…will be held personally responsible”*? How will our Judge view us if we use our tradition of ecclesial autonomy to retain sin within our fellowship?

Is it not evident that we cannot say, “I will never permit false doctrine in my own ecclesia but will permit it within my fellowship.” Is it not obvious that we must never allow the tradition of ecclesial autonomy to void the command of Matthew 18? Furthermore, if we permit error in our fellowship, the tendency is that over time it will become accepted into the other ecclesias within the fellowship and a gradual declension from the truth will occur.

By accepting the tradition of “ecclesial autonomy” and rejecting the scriptural command of Matthew 18 within their fellowship some fellowships have built into their very structure the acceptance of sin.

That Brother Roberts never intended to have his statement on ecclesial autonomy allow known unrepentant sinners remain in the body seems evident from his various quotes; we will repeat two that we have already given to show this.

1. *“Rule 35 of the Birmingham Constitution has* ***no reference to cases where first principles are in question.***  *The rule relates solely to disputed questions of personal action and character…”* *[The Christadelphian* April 1887; quoted from *The Berean Christadelphian,* January 2000; emphasis mine].
2. *“The apostolic rule is to* ***withdraw from*** *every brother who walks disorderly and from those who teach heresy—without reference to the question of what the Lord may finally think of them. And the rule is defensive in its bearing…****The time for withdrawal*** *is when men drift into unscriptural attitudes of faith or practice…unless we observe this apostolically prescribed scrupulosity, the Truth would soon be suffocated and disappear…we are not at liberty to relax the appointments of God…”* (Quoted from *The Berean Christadelphian* Oct. 1981; emphasis mine).

We can also see that Brother Roberts actually implemented this advice within his fellowship, as shown by his actions in the foreword of this booklet.

To claim “ecclesial autonomy” under the false interpretation of #3, and thus allow sin to be accepted into one’s fellowship and then attribute this action to Brother Roberts, does him a grave injustice.

This interpretation was not supported by Brother Roberts nor should it be supported by us. It does a twofold harm. It destroys the meaning of fellowship and it allows sin to be accepted into the body.

**An Old Testament Example**

Obviously our own ecclesia is the one for which we have primary responsibility since it is the one with which we have the most intimate association and knowledge. However, if we hear of someone in our fellowship from a far distance who is teaching or practicing false doctrine we also have an obligation to go to him and to correct the matter (Deut 13:12-17).

Deut 13:12  *If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the LORD thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying,* 13 *Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known;* 14 *Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you;* 15 *Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword.* 16 *And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the LORD thy God: and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again.* 17 *And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers.*

Brother H.P. Mansfield says in reference to these verses in The *Christadelphian Expositor* on Deuteronomy,

*…True Israelites were not at liberty to ignore such a report. They had to carry out Yahweh’s instructions, that being the basis of their occupancy of the Land…*

*…In these times, it is sometimes easier to ignore the teaching of Ecclesias afar off as being a matter of little local concern—but if that is done the influence of error may ultimately permeate the local Ecclesia. Nevertheless, the most careful investigation and warning must be made before condemnation is proclaimed…*

*…A state of war is to be entered into against cities given to apostasy. Today the battle of faith is waged with the weapons of fellowship and doctrine, not by the sword (See 2 Cor 10:3-6, which might well be based on the Scripture before us)…*

*…Paul set forth the purpose of disfellowshipping as designed for “the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:4)…*

*…As the city and its contents are represented as being defiled by apostasy, disciples must learn to destroy all remnants of false doctrine so that nothing of the apostasy remains. There must be a thorough cleansing of its polluting influence…*

*…In the circumstances before us Israelites who carried out the will of God would have viewed the apostasy of the city concerned (like an Ecclesia today that embraces wrong teaching or false standards)* [This parenthesis is his] *from the standpoint of God, and recognizing such sin in all its abhorrence would have commenced a warfare of faith against the guilty town to the honour of Yahweh’s name…*

Brother Roberts also comments on these verses.

*“When…it is reported that any Brother or Ecclesia is following a false doctrine…it is obligatory on other brethren and Ecclesias to ‘enquire and make search and ask diligently’ to see whether it is true and the thing certain.”* (*The Christadelphian,* 1886, Quoted from *The Berean Magazine* 1995.)

In saying *“other… Ecclesias”* he is referring to other Ecclesias in the fellowship.

We believe that every ecclesia in the fellowship has a responsibility to every other ecclesia, and to every brother and sister in the fellowship, to make sure that the standards of the Truth are maintained. Every ecclesia is quite able to adopt such a procedure should they choose.

**Ecclesial Autonomy in the 1800s and**

**Ecclesial Autonomy Today**

Most of us recognize that Brother Thomas was used by God to formally establish the Truth in these latter days. Yet no one claims that he was perfect. Christ, for example, did not return when Brother Thomas expected. Imperfections like this, however, do not take away from the wonderful work that he did.

Brother Roberts was also used by God to establish the ecclesias in these latter days. He too was imperfect. The Birmingham Statement of Faith, for example, was determined by many to be imperfect on Rule 24 and so was amended to the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith. This was a doctrinal amendment and caused a fellowship division. Ecclesial autonomy is not a doctrinal issue. Any individual, ecclesia or fellowship can recognize their duty to all other brothers and sisters in their fellowship and follow the command of Matthew 18 without any doctrinal changes to their *Statement of Faith.*

Some of Brother Roberts’ works that directly relate to setting up and running the ecclesias are *the Ecclesial Guide*, the *Birmingham Constitution*, and *the Birmingham Statement of Faith*. Of these three, only the last one relates directly to doctrinal matters. Brother Roberts argued for ecclesial autonomy in his day, both within his *Ecclesial Guide,* Items 41 and 42 and in the *Birmingham Constitution,* Rules 34-35 (see the Addendum). Nevertheless when questioned on this he agreed that his suggestion regarding ecclesial autonomy was “imperfect” but thought that this was the best that could be done (*The Christadelphian,* 1887).

It may have been the best that could be done in his day, but we live in different times. In the modern communication age in which we live we do not need to retain this imperfection. These procedures were set up in the 1800s–in the horse and buggy days, literally, and in the days of the telegraph. Most brethren could not travel more than a few miles away from their homes nor could they pick up a telephone to call another brother or sister. The local ecclesias were essentially isolated.

Today we have the automobile and the airplane, the telephone and the Internet (including the World Wide Web with individual and ecclesial websites, email, Facebook, Skype etc.). Books, pamphlets and letters are published by average brethren and are included on web sites and instantaneously circulated throughout the world. We can, and often do, have daily contact with brothers and sisters throughout the world. What used to be called “our local ecclesia” is not so local anymore.

With our increased ability to communicate comes an increased responsibility to our brothers and sisters. The traditions that were suitable for the past may not be suitable for the present. We must not claim ignorance of other ecclesias beliefs when they have web-sites, articles and emails plainly stating their beliefs. With the Internet and the telephone we can immediately communicate with another brother anywhere in the world. Today we cannot claim ignorance of sin within our midst nor avoid our responsibility to any of our erring brethren when we stand before Christ. We know what they believe and we have the ability to easily visit them or to communicate with them.

This “imperfection” regarding ecclesial autonomy could be corrected by having all ecclesias in the fellowship work cooperatively together to resolve any fellowship difficulty. This should be done, particularly since we have seen where this “imperfection” has lead in the past 100 plus years since Brother Roberts’ death. Look again at pages 4-5 to see the sins that are permitted within the body. We can see where our fellowship policies have taken us and so are without excuse.

Also, let us be reminded that removing this imperfection would result in no doctrinal change since ecclesial autonomy is a non-doctrinal procedure.

**Block Dis-Fellowship**

Some Christadelphians also object to separating themselves from another ecclesia under their tradition of *“block dis-fellowship”.* They say, “We cannot dis-fellowship an entire ecclesia!”

They won’t dis-fellowship a brother sunken in sin because of “ecclesial autonomy” and they won’t dis-fellowship an entire ecclesia sunken in sin because of “block dis-fellowship.” Through the acceptance of man-made traditions the Truth is being destroyed.

Let us rather accept the command of Matthew 18 so as to save our brethren, both individually and ecclesially.

**A Walk And Conduct**

Sometimes we hear a brother or sister’s behavior being excused by saying “it is a walk and conduct” issue. By this they seem to mean that the persons “walk and conduct” is a personal matter left to the brother’s own judgment and should not to be interfered with.

This, of course, may legitimately include something that is morally indifferent or something not specifically forbidden by the scriptures.

A case in point can be taken from Brother Roberts on March 1, 1896. He was on a voyage from Dunedin to Tasmania and was visiting the ecclesia at Kaitangata for the Breaking of Bread. He said, “*The strong smell of tobacco was a jar to that holiness ‘in all manner of conversation,’ ‘both in body and spirit,’ which the Truth prescribes.*

*“The Truth does not teach all the lessons at once. Time is needed for growth in knowledge and duty. When, at last, it completes its work, the members of the house of Christ are a joy to God and man. It is very certain there will be no smell of tobacco in the Kingdom of God” (The Berean Christadelphian* January 2014, pp 11-12).

Brother Roberts did not use the phrase, “it is a walk and conduct issue”, but this might have been used. He thought it was unwise to use tobacco but left the matter there.

However we must never use “it is a walk and conduct issue” to permit the acceptance of any open known sin, such as the list given on pages 4-5. For example, one may say that fornication is “a walk and conduct issue” and so I will not use Matthew 18 to speak to him about it. To be sure, the brother or sister has a “walk and conduct issue” that involves fornication. But just as surely this conduct is a sin, is therefore doctrinal, and will keep him from entering the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10).

Whenever sin is accepted within a fellowship “principles” are being violated. To call actions like fornication, homosexuality, etc., “walks and conduct issues” and thus “disputed questions of personal action and character,” is to sadly misuse a tradition of man to nullify a command of the scriptures.

**We All Sin**

Some others may say, “We all sin, yea, often we sin daily, and so we cannot act on Matthew 18 for none of us are free from sin.”

Of course we all sin. Whatever does that have to do with being obedient to the command of Matthew 18? Because we all sin must we therefore accept it *as the standard* for our fellowship position?

Sin must never be *accepted* either within ourselves or within our fellowship. If we sin, we must ask forgiveness and put away the sin. And if we ever do get to the point where we *accept* a sin within ourselves and continue in it, let us fervently pray that a brother or a sister comes to us in the spirit of Matthew 18 and requires us to confront the sin and put it away! And may we likewise, in love, do the same for our brethren. To argue otherwise is destructive to one’s own salvation and to the body as a whole. It is just one more fleshly excuse to avoid following the command of Matthew 18. Should we reject this salvation because the brother coming to us is from another ecclesia of our fellowship? Or should we refuse to offer it because he is in another ecclesia of our fellowship?

We have considered several reasons that some use so as not to follow the command of Matthew 18—*it is not in* *the BASF, ecclesial autonomy, block dis-fellowship, a walk and conduct issue* and *we all sin.* Notice that they are all traditions that have developed over the years that will allow sin to take hold within the body. And since the sin that dwells within us is ever ready to look for an excuse to avoid its destruction, these excuses, particularly when added together, have a cumulative effect.

For example, if a brother is committing fornication in another ecclesia, we can easily have these various traditions work together to dissuade us from acting in a scriptural way. We might say, “This sin is not listed in the BASF, nevertheless, I would never allow this within my own ecclesia. However I cannot violate *ecclesial autonomy,* and I have heard others say it is *a walk and conduct issue,* and certainly *we all sin* and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In any case no one in his ecclesia is confronting this and I certainly cannot engage in *block dis-fellowship* of the whole ecclesia!”

If we were only contending with one tradition, we might overcome it. But when a fellowship accepts all of these traditions one can easily become overwhelmed and so become disobedient to the plain command of Matthew 18.

**A Better Way to Resolve Inter-Ecclesial Differences**

**Sin Involving an Individual Within Our Local Ecclesia**

If a brother or sister is sinning in our *ecclesia,* we must approach them using the method given to us by Christ in Matthew 18:15-17. Following the steps of Matthew 18 we will either correct the sin or remove the sinner. We will find that almost all such decisions of the local ecclesia will be accepted by the fellowship as a whole. This is particularly true if we all initially agree on a sound fellowship position.

If a decision in another ecclesia of our fellowship is one that does not involve any principles of the Truth, we should consider letting it stand. No principle of the Truth is involved.

If the matter is so egregious that one or more other ecclesias question our decision, let the fellowship, with equal numbers from each ecclesia, get together to resolve the matter. Then let the vote of the ecclesias stand. Once again, no principle of the Truth is being brought into question, such as our earlier consideration of “is he a drunkard or not.”

**Sin Involving an Individual Within Our Fellowship**

If a brother or sister is sinning in our *fellowship*, we should use the exact same approach as we would if a brother is sinning in our ecclesia. Matthew 18 does not say that it is limited to one’s local ecclesia. Matthew 18 must include everyone with whom we are in fellowship. Thus, if we see a brother anywhere in our fellowship who is sinning, we must go to him “between he and thee alone.”

If the second step is needed, we should take at least one other brother with us who is from the ecclesia of the brother who is in error.

If the third or fourth step is needed, this too should be done through the erring brother’s ecclesia with us attending and taking part.

Using this method, all individual sinners within our *fellowship* would be subject to the same standards of Matthew 18:15-17. The sin would be corrected or the sinner removed.

**Two Ecclesias Who Differ on a Matter of Facts Concerning Personal Actions**

But what if another ecclesia disagrees with the fellowship position that we take on a particular brother? This is the case given to us by Brother Roberts in his *Ecclesial Guide* as mentioned earlier on page 8. One ecclesia had a brother in it that they examined for alleged drunkenness and found him not to be a drunkard, and another ecclesia, or other ecclesias, examining the same set of facts believed him to be a drunkard. We are assuming that all ecclesias in the fellowship recognize that a drunkard will not enter the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10) and so cannot be retained in fellowship (1 Cor 5:11).

The other ecclesia, or ecclesias, could write to the first ecclesia stating that from the information they had they believed the brother was indeed a drunkard and should not be retained in fellowship. They could then request that the facts of the case be re-examined and request to join with the first ecclesia for this re-examination.

The brother involved would remain in fellowship with all members of the fellowship until the matter was resolved.

After a re-examination of the facts with all ecclesias working cooperatively together, let a vote be taken by all the ecclesias together, and then let all members abide by the results of the vote—whatever it may be. *No principle of the Truth is involved.* *All agree that a known unrepentant drunkard must not be retained in fellowship.* The only question is: Is this brother a drunkard, or not? This is an instance of a different interpretation of the “facts” of the case regarding “personal action and character.”

Some members may disagree with the decision, as is the case in many non-doctrinal votes of the ecclesia. Accept the decision of the majority.

“But”, it may be asked, “what if the brother was wrongly removed from fellowship?” Let him do what we must all do in these situations. Accept it patiently. He should, of course, stop anything that may even give the appearance of evil (1 Thes 5:22), remembering Paul’s words, *“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak”* (Rom 14:21).And while striving to correct any issues of concern, he can continue to attend the meeting without breaking bread with them. Let him break bread at home. Being in fellowship with a group or being in isolation, in this instance, will have no effect on one’s acceptance, or lack thereof, by the Great Judge who will soon give perfect judgment. Note again that in this instance it is only the “facts” of the case that are being disputed concerning a brother’s “personal actions.” No principle of the truth is being questioned.

*But it may be wise not to get involved in the first place.* Here we have one ecclesia who examined the “facts” of the case regarding a brother’s “personal actions” and came to a particular judgment. We, looking from a distance and perhaps without all of the facts, may come to a different conclusion. Yet no principle of the truth is being questioned. It may be wise to let the matter stand, supporting their ecclesial decision while helping both them and the individual brother where possible.

Brother Roberts was right in saying that we should not break up a fellowship because of a difference of opinion on such a matter. Resolving the matter as described herein would resolve the matter and at the same time maintain true fellowship within the fellowship.

**Sin Involving an Entire Ecclesia**

This could take a number of forms, including, for example, open fornication or adultery by someone within the ecclesia where the ecclesia in question permits the sinner to continue in his sin. Or the sin could be one of faith, where, for example, a brother sent a letter or pamphlet supporting the partial inspiration of the scriptures, etc.

In these cases *a letter* should be sent to the Recording Brother of the ecclesia in question notifying him of the situation, stating that this was a matter of fellowship and requesting that the matter be scripturally resolved. This letter could be sent by anyone who became aware of the sin, an individual, a group of individuals, or by one or more ecclesias. This is the method that Paul used when he became aware of fornication in the ecclesia at Corinth (1 Cor 5:1). Paul was not in this ecclesia, but he was in fellowship with them and so was responsible for maintaining the purity of the truth. We have exactly the same obligation.

After a suitable period of time, say 1-2 months, if the matter was not satisfactorily resolved *a* *second letter* should be sent requesting a meeting with the ecclesia involved, again stating that this was a fellowship matter.

If this meeting did not resolve the issue, all of the concerned parties involved should send *a third letter.* This letter would be sent to the entire fellowship notifying them of the situation. It would include the steps that had been taken so far, stating that this was a matter of fellowship and requesting a meeting of the entire fellowship to resolve this issue.

If the matter was not resolved by this endeavor, all of the concerned parties should withdraw their fellowship from all individuals or ecclesias who were sinning or who were tolerating (accepting within their midst) this sin.

Using all of the processes that we have reviewed above, *no known sinner* would be permitted to remain within the fellowship—nor would any who extended their fellowship to a known sinner. Implementing Matthew 18 as described would either correct the sin or have it removed from the body. The entire fellowship would thus be free from *accepted* or tolerated sin.

**Some Summary Thoughts**

Our starting point is to have all ecclesias within the fellowship agree on a sound *Statement of Faith.* After this is done, all members of the fellowship would then use Matthew 18 to correct any brother or sister who had fallen into sin. All members would follow the *commands* of God, including Matthew 18:15-18, and never allow any man-made *tradition* to annul any command of God.

Acting in this fashion should reduce much of the conflict that we often now see within the fellowship. All brothers and sisters would be working cooperatively together to fight *against sin* instead of, as is often now the case, fighting *for the acceptance of sin*. Allowing sins within our midst, as some fellowships do now, keeps the thorns in our sides and the pricks in our eyes. Once we remove the litany of accepted sin we would remove many of the conflicts associated with them.

And should any fellowship disagreement arise, the fellowship would work cooperatively together as one assembly to resolve the matter.

In the age in which we live, the fellowship should be able to do this with no more difficulty than it was in getting together for an ecclesial meeting in the 1800s. A distance of ten miles then was often an unmanageable distance. Now we have relatively easy access with our brothers and sisters throughout the world via travel, the telephone and the Internet.

As a practical matter, the local ecclesias would continue just as they do now. Each ecclesia would vote in its officers each year, decide on lectures, mid-week Bible classes, frateranls, etc. Fellowship issues would also be dealt primarily within the ecclesia as now. Only if a conflict arose between ecclesias, would the fellowship as a whole be called upon to resolve the conflict.

As an ecclesia can be autonomous (self-governing) so too can a fellowship. The fellowship with a common *Statement of Faith* that is accepted by the entire fellowship can act together as one autonomous body to maintain the purity of the Truth within the fellowship.

We would not have one brother in fellowship with one ecclesia and out of fellowship with another with the two ecclesias claiming to be in fellowship with each other. A memorial meeting at a fraternal gathering would not have several different members, in fellowship with some and out of fellowship with others, going into several different rooms to break bread. And we would not have *known unrepentant accepted sin* residing anywhere within the fellowship. Every brother and sister in the fellowship would, in love, be responsible for every other brother and sister in the fellowship.

If a brother or sister was openly sinning in *our ecclesia* *or in our fellowship,* we would approach them using the method given to us by Christ in Matthew 18:15-17. All ecclesias in the fellowship would work cooperatively together as one body to maintain a sound fellowship. We must in obedience to our Master and in love to our brothers and sisters commit ourselves to bringing any erring brother or sister to the fullness of the truth. If we cannot do this in steps 1, 2 or 3 of Matthew 18, we must then remove them from our fellowship in step 4. This is the substance of Matthew 18. And it is based on love. True love. It is long-suffering and kind and never harsh but it also rejoiceth in the truth (1 Cor 13). We would apply this command to all the brothers and sisters in our fellowship. Our love would not be limited to those of our own little ecclesia. When we “tell it unto the church” (Matt 18:17) we tell it to “*the assembly of called out ones.”* This assembly is not necessarily exclusive to an individual ecclesia. It can also include the fellowship, similar to *the assembly of called out ones* that occurred in Acts Chapter 15 when the brethren came together to consider the matter of the Gentiles. Our responsibility would lie with all brothers and sisters with whom we are in fellowship, whereas those outside of our fellowship would be left to God’s judgment (1 Cor 5:13).

It is sometimes argued that one who holds the position as we put forth herein would not be in fellowship with Brother Roberts. This argument loses much of its force when coming from brethren who actively argue for a fellowship position that keeps known active sin within its midst. It seems more likely that he would look at the ecclesias today and argue for a position very much like the one we have put forth herein. Be that as it may, it seems certain that he would not remain in fellowship with those who retain active sin within their midst, while in some instances using him for a justification of the acceptance of this sin.

The position that he took on ecclesial autonomy may have been what was needed in the early formation of the latter day ecclesias in the 1800s. Those were simpler and more moral times. We, like Lot, live in Sodom. *“As it was in the days of Lot…Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed”* (Luke 17:28-30). And we know what happened to the ecclesia in Sodom. As Brother Roberts was faithful in his day and time, so let us be in ours.

We must also be cautious of what we teach and of the example that we set. We are told in Matthew 5:19, *“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”*  “Teaching” includes any instruction that we give. We may have questions about many doctrinal things but when we begin to “teach” or “do” unscriptural things our *faith* and *works* become active disobedience. In these instances we place ourselves in a different position. Furthermore, when we are in a fellowship where sin is permitted, we are in some significant measure “teaching” all those who see us that it is permissible to accept these sins.

When we look at the various fellowships that hold different fellowship positions, we often see wonderfully able, committed and zealous brothers and sisters. However, if they are in a fellowship where error is tolerated, they also are in error. It is wise to remember what Paul said of the Jews in his day, *“I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge”* (Rom 10:2).

Correcting error in our midst will not be easy. Many committed brothers and sisters have grown up in Christadelphian families and have never really considered any other fellowship position. They learned the truth as a child from their own fellowship position and were then baptized into it. It will be hard to either change the accepted tradition in their fellowship, or to leave those whom they love.

Others coming from the world were brought to the truth by those in one of the various fellowships having error within it and did not have a proper opportunity to consider another fellowship position.

In some instances brothers and sisters may not be aware of another choice. They came into the Truth seeing wonderfully able and zealous brothers and sisters who had a generally sound understanding of the Truth and so they looked no farther. Many may have heard only peripherally about divorce and remarriage, the partial inspiration of the Scriptures, or a number of other things that require a correct scriptural understanding. Furthermore, various erroneous “traditions,” including, *it is not in the BASF,* e*cclesial autonomy*, *block dis-fellowship, walk and conduct, we all sin*, or others, may inhibit them from properly implementing the commands of God.

Thus the solution is not easy. And we make no final judgment about what Christ will think of these brethren. Rather we ascribe to Brother Roberts’ statement, *“The apostolic rule is to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and from those who teach heresy—without reference to the question of what the Lord may finally think of them.”*

Implementing Matthew 18 as outlined above would keep the entire fellowship free from *accepted sin*. No known sin within the fellowship would be accepted. It would either be corrected or removed. The procedures outlined herein would also resolve issues between ecclesias without having one brother in fellowship with one ecclesia and out of fellowship in another ecclesia with the two ecclesias claiming to be in “fellowship” with each other. All ecclesias in the fellowship would work cooperatively together as one body to maintain a sound fellowship.

Our main concern within our fellowship should not be our insistence of *individual rights in* *ecclesial autonomy* but rather on maintaining *oneness of faith in fellowship*. And this unity of fellowship must be based on a sound fellowship position that is insisted on by every individual in every ecclesia of the fellowship.

If we are in fellowship with those who are in fellowship with sin, we are in fellowship with the sin. If one ecclesia allows a known unrepentant sinner to remain in fellowship with them, this sinner is in fellowship with all in that fellowship. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked” (Gal 6:7).

What then must we do? The steps are really quite uncomplicated. We must, 1) adopt a sound scriptural fellowship position something like the one shown above on pages 1-2, and 2) we must implement Matthew 18 to correct any sin should it arise in our ecclesia or our fellowship, never letting “ecclesial autonomy” or any other tradition or argument subvert us from the clear commands of God. This means that we either correct the sin or remove it from us, standing alone if necessary.

Implementing Matthew 18 as outlined above would also keep the entire fellowship free from all *accepted sin*. Failings, imperfections and sin, within us and among us, will sadly remain as long as the flesh remains but must never be accepted as a way of life. Our fellowship must be with the Father and His son, not with sin.

The correction, although intellectually simple and uncomplicated, will however be, for personal, social and various other fleshly reasons, difficult to implement. Nevertheless, it is within the capacity of every faithful brother and sister. We can take these steps ecclesially, with like-minded brethren, or lacking that we can stand alone. And if we have the courage to do this, none of the sins mentioned on pages 4-5 will be accepted within our fellowship and we will have a sound fellowship with like-minded brothers and sisters.

If you are interested in pursuing this matter further please contact us by using one of the methods listed in the foreword of this booklet.

**Addendum**

The documents in the addendum are written in normal size print. The comments about the documents are written in this size smaller print.

***The Birmingham Constitution***

Rules 34 and 35

The Constitution is a set of principles which state how the ecclesia is to be *constituted* or governed. It is primarily a non-doctrinal document although it does at times have doctrinal implications. Rules 34 and 35 are shown below because they relate to ecclesial autonomy.

**Rule 34**

“That no brother or sister withdrawn from by, or out of fellowship with, another ecclesia, shall be received in fellowship until the cause shall have been investigated and found such as to warrant the reception of the said brother or sister; but that this investigation shall not take place without first asking the said other ecclesia to take part in the proposed investigation; that if the said other ecclesia shall refuse their cooperation in the said investigation, the matters in question shall be investigated without them; that if, on the other hand, they consent to take part in it, they shall, after the re-investigation conducted in their presence, have equal voting power with the first ecclesia, and that no decision shall be valid without the concurrence of a majority of the assembly so constituted of the two ecclesias fused together in equality of numbers; if one ecclesia exceeds the other in number, the equality to be obtained by arrangement.”

**Rule 35**

“That in case of another ecclesia, after either of these processes, receiving into their fellowship any brother or sister from whom we have withdrawn, or who may have separated from us, we shall not consider it a cause of separation from them, regarding the case as one of difference of judgment as to facts merely. We shall be content in that case to maintain our own withdrawal from the brother or sister in question. Should they, on the other hand, receive such without re-investigation or without asking our concurrence in any re-investigation that may take place, we ourselves shall apply to the said ecclesia for re-investigation in the form defined by the last rule, and only in the case of their refusal, shall we consider that their action in the case has furnished a cause of separation.”

***The Ecclesial Guide***

Items 41 and 42

by Brother Robert Roberts

The Ecclesial Guide is primarily a “guide” and not a doctrinal document, although it does at times have doctrinal implications. The two items below show Brother Roberts thoughts on ecclesial autonomy.

**Item 41. Involved in Another Ecclesia’s Trouble**

“An ecclesia may be at peace in itself, but may get involved in the troubles of other ecclesias through an incorrect mode of action. The simple law of Christ, to do to others as we would be done by, will greatly help us to take the right and wholesome course. Let us suppose, then, that some other ecclesia has withdrawn from a brother on grounds that have seemed just to the majority thereof; is it right that the brother so withdrawn from should be received by you? You can settle this by considering: How would you like the said ecclesia to act towards a brother or sister you have withdrawn from? Should you like them to receive such? There is only one answer—No. This yields this general rule that no ecclesia ought to receive into fellowship a brother or sister that has been withdrawn from elsewhere.

“If you say "perhaps the brother or sister is unjustly withdrawn from", such a case is possible; and the door ought not to be shut against the consideration of such a possibility. But there is a right way of dealing with such a supposition. And the simple rule of Christ aforesaid will again be an all-sufficient help. Should you not like your decision in the case of a brother withdrawn from to be held good until it is proved a wrong one? There is only one answer: Yes. We ought, therefore, to respect the withdrawals of other ecclesias until we have proved them unjustifiable.

“But here again we must be careful. There is a right way and a wrong way of trying such a case. Would you like the case of a brother you have withdrawn from to be tried behind your back? There is only one answer: You would not. Therefore you ought not to hear the case of a brother who has been withdrawn from, without the presence of those, either actually or by representation, who have withdrawn from him. If a withdrawn-from brother comes to your ecclesia and alleges the injustice of the withdrawal, if you are disposed to listen to the case, your duty is (meanwhile withholding fellowship) to apprise the ecclesia that has withdrawn from him, that he applies for your fellowship on the ground of the withdrawal being unjust, and that you wish to investigate the case concurrently with them. If the withdrawing ecclesia refuse to grant such an investigation, they place themselves in the wrong, and justify you in examining the case for yourselves in their absence. But an enlightened ecclesia would not refuse. They would act on Christ's rule. They would do as they would like to be done by. If they were the withdrawn from but demurring brother, or the doubtful ecclesia applying for re-examination, they would like to have the opportunity of judging for themselves, and would, therefore, grant that opportunity thus respectfully applied for. The result would tend to peace. The concurrent re-examination would either manifest the righteousness of the withdrawal, or the uncertainty and perhaps unjustifiableness of it. In either case, the course to be taken by the applying ecclesia would be freed from doubt.”

**Item 42. Ecclesias in Relation One to Another**

“If a careful attention is given to these reasonable rules of procedure between one ecclesia and another, there will be little danger of disagreement. The bond of union is the reception of the one faith, and submission to the commandments of the Lord. It is nothing less than a calamity when rupture on secondary issues sets in, where these other conditions of union exist. It is not only calamitous, but sinful somewhere.

**“There ought to be no interference of one ecclesia with another. At the same time, they have reciprocal rights. Ecclesial independence is a principle essential to be maintained.** But it is no part of that independence to say that no ecclesia shall consider a matter that another has decided upon, if that matter comes before the first ecclesia, and challenges their judgment, and, in fact, requires a decision. In the example already discussed, if a brother withdrawn from by one ecclesia applies for the fellowship of another, that other ecclesia is bound to consider the application, and it is no infringement of the independence of the first ecclesia that it should be so, subject to the rules and attitudes indicated. It would, in fact, be a renunciation of ***its own independence*,** were it to refuse to do so. Respect for the first ecclesia requires that it accept its decision until it sees grounds for a different view; and in the investigation of these grounds it ought to invite its co-operation, as already indicated. But the mere fact of the application imposes upon it the obligation to consider and investigate the matter, if there are prima facie grounds for doing so. The other ecclesia would make a mistake if it considered such a procedure an infringement of **its independence,** Such a view would, in reality, be a trammelling of **the independence of every assembly**; for it would then amount to this, that no assembly had the right to judge a case coming before them if that case happen to have already been adjudicated upon by another ecclesia. The judgment of one would thus be set up as a rule for all. **An ecclesia has no right to judge except for itself.**

**“This is the independence not to be interfered with;** but a similar right to judge must be conceded to all, and the exercise of it, if tempered with a respectful and proper procedure, would never offend an enlightened body anywhere. In the majority of cases the withdrawal of one ecclesia is practically the withdrawal of all, since all will respect it till set aside, and since, in most cases, a concurrent investigation would lead to its ratification. But there may be cases where a reasonable doubt exists, and where a second ecclesia will come to a different conclusion from the first.

“What is to be done then? Are the two ecclesias that are agreed in the basis of fellowship to fall out because they are of a different judgment on a question of fact? This would be a lamentable result, a mistaken course every way. They have each exercised their prerogative of independent judgment: **let each abide by its own decision, without interfering with each other. The one can fellowship a certain brother, the other cannot.**

“Are they to aggravate the misery of a perhaps very trumpery and unworthy affair by refusing to recognize each other, because they differ in judgment about one person? What sadder spectacle can there be than to see servants of the Lord Jesus frowning at each other, and denying each other the comfort of mutual friendship and help, because they cannot agree about a given action or speech of perhaps some unworthy person. **The course of wisdom in such a case is certainly to agree to differ.** An ecclesia acting otherwise, demanding of another ecclesia, as a condition of fellowship, that they shall endorse their decision in a case that has become the business of both—is in reality infringing **that principle of ecclesial independence** which they desire to have recognized in their own case. It would be to impose what might be an intolerable tyranny upon the brethren; for suppose it were to happen, as it might happen, that a deserving brother or sister were withdrawn from on insufficient grounds by an assembly that might happen to be composed of persons not remarkable for breadth of judgment, to what hopeless injustice such a brother or sister would be subjected **if other ecclesias were to be debarred from forming their own judgment** in the event of application for their fellowship” [Emphasis mine].

The Ecclesial Guide is a wonderful guide, but I believe that Brother Roberts was mistaken in his view of Ecclesial Autonomy. Furthermore, as presently interpreted by a number of brothers and sisters, ecclesial autonomy goes well beyond his view and so permits active sin to be retained within the body.

***Birmingham Statement of Faith***

By Brother Roberts

The Statement of Faith is a statement of core shared beliefs. It is the primary doctrinal statement of the fellowship and so has fellowship implications.

Rule 24 is shown below since it was the rule that related to the amendment causing the division between the Unamended and the Amended groups (the BUSF and the BASF). It is sometimes argued by the Amended Group that the amended section in Rule 24 was only a clarification and so was not a doctrinal change. It is irrefutable however that it did result in a fellowship division.

*“24. That at the appearing of Christ prior to the establishment of the Kingdom, the responsible (namely, those who know the revealed will of God, and have been called upon to submit to it), dead and living—obedient and disobedient—will be summoned before his judgment seat "to be judged according to their works," and "receive in body according to what they have done, whether it be good or bad."* ***(***[*2 Cor. 5:10*](http://www.christadelphia.org/basf.htm)*;* [*2 Tim. 4:1*](http://www.christadelphia.org/basf.htm)*;* [*Rom. 2:5-6, 16*](http://www.christadelphia.org/basf.htm)*;* [*14:10-12*](http://www.christadelphia.org/basf.htm)*;* [*1 Cor. 4:5*](http://www.christadelphia.org/basf.htm)*;* [*Rev. 11:18*](http://www.christadelphia.org/basf.htm)*).*

“Note: Clause 24 was amended in Jan. 1898, to refute the teaching that one may avoid being raised for judgment by refusing baptism. With this change, this document came to be known as the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith (BASF). While nearly all Christadelphian ecclesias worldwide have adopted this amended statement of faith, a few ecclesias in North America still use the original Birmingham Statement of Faith (BSF), which has also been called "Unamended" or BUSF. This clause in the original document reads "... the responsible will be summoned before his judgement seat ..." (<http://www.christadelphia.org/basf.htm>)

**Preliminary Draft** **of the Berean Restatement June 5, 1957**

(The underlined emphasis in this heading is mine)

* DIVORCE -

*“We would like to affirm what has always been the generally accepted position of the Berean fellowship on this question. We have not felt it necessary or wise to add to, or change, the basis established by earlier brethren.*

*“We believe divorce is contrary to the commands of Christ. We believe that remarriage after divorce is contrary to the commands of Christ. “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord. Let not the wife depart from (korizo – put asunder – Matt. 19:6) her husband. “But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. And let not the husband put away his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10-11).*

“We believe further that these 2 evils are not only contrary to divine command but are in direct violation of the deep principles of the mind of Christ. They will be eschewed as unthinkable by all true brethren and sisters of Christ.

***“As to what to do in relation to the various problems and complications that arise when brethren and sisters choose to violate these commands and get themselves into confused positions on which the Scriptures give no detailed guidance, we believe the only practical solution, in fairness to the Truth and the general welfare of the brotherhood, is that which has always been generally in application among us–to ask all who, in spite of the entreaties of the brotherhood, have chosen to put themselves in a questionable position, to accept the responsibility for their acts and to stand aside and await the decision of the judgment seat of Christ.***

***“We do not judge. Breaking God’s laws in relation to marriage can create such complications that we confess ourselves unable to judge. The issue has wrought great havoc and divided sincere brethren. We believe the Berean solution is the only one that safeguards the Truth and the unity of the brotherhood and isolates the problem in a simple and effectual way…”*** [Bolded emphasis mine].

(This above preliminary draft relates to

*the Berean Basis of Fellowship*)

This *preliminary draft* was sent to the different Berean Ecclesias for a vote to determine if it was an acceptable position. A number of Ecclesias accepted this *Preliminary Draft*, including the Worchester Ecclesia of Massachusetts. Ultimately this Preliminary Draft was not accepted by the main body of Bereans and a different Final Draft, published in the *Berean Magazine*, July 1960 was voted upon and accepted by the main body of Bereans.

The final draft that was accepted **omitted the bolded portion above.** The final *accepted* statement on divorce thus reads, in part, as follows:

*“We would like to affirm what has always been the generally accepted position of the Berean fellowship on this question. We have not felt it necessary or wise to add to, or change, the basis established by earlier brethren.*

*“We believe divorce is contrary to the commands of Christ. We believe that remarriage after divorce is contrary to the commands of Christ. “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord. Let not the wife depart from (korizo – put asunder – Matt. 19:6) her husband. “But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. And let not the husband put away his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10-11).*

*“We believe further that these 2 evils are not only contrary to divine command but are in direct violation of the deep principles of the mind of Christ. They will be eschewed as unthinkable by all true brethren and sisters of Christ.”*

As can be seen, the final accepted statement on divorce completely omits “what to do” if a brother or sister got divorced and remarried. It thus substantially altered (some would day weakened) the document.

The final draft still makes a strong statement against divorce and remarriage but it does not say what to do if it occurs. As a practical matter, this omission has resulted in the acceptance of divorce and remarriage within the fellowship. Again, when I say *acceptance* I mean that brothers and sisters who are divorced and remarried are permitted to remain within the fellowship.

This *Preliminary* *Draft* **with the bolded portion included** is in general harmony with the position put forth in the document I have placed before you. We believe that this is still the only practical solution for the Truth and for the general welfare of the brotherhood on all matters of fellowship. If the processes as put forth herein are accepted, it will resolve many of the problems that have developed in the Christadelphian body. It will also assist in preparing a people to meet their Lord.