

Dear brother Ed:

July 4, 1973

Loving Greetings

I was very encouraged by your phone call. It strengthened my conviction -- which I have held from the beginning -- that the Berean fellowship as a whole will keep its balance on this unsavory subject that is an obsession with so many, and will not depart from the sound foundation of our pioneer brethren.

If we hold fast, I am sure that many, if not all, who have separated themselves will return, as has happened in the past.

Among those who have precipitately separated themselves, some have already (since separation) changed their views in fundamental respects -- some of them on the very points which they made the greatest issue when they left. This is not pointed out in disparagement, but as a sign of encouragement indicating that they are not as rock-bound as they may appear, and could therefore well come to the realization that -- inasmuch as they themselves have changed in basic points -- their forcing this to a fellowship issue was not wise or justified

And we hear encouraging reports that others -- once apparently rigid in their beliefs -- are now "rethinking" their position. I fervently pray that this will cause them to stop and think, and to wonder at the wisdom of breaking up ecclesias on this ancient issue.

I feel very badly about not being able to respond affirmatively to your suggestion, but my heart and prayers are very much with you. From my few minutes conversation with you, I have a very different (and much more encouraging) view of the circumstances in Richard and the reason for the conference.

I cannot believe that this conference is wise, but I do deeply sympathize with, the motives you expressed. I am sure that this good motive lay behind the Richard Resolution (with which again I unfortunately cannot agree as wise or practical under present conditions -- more on this later).

The conference would be much less of a matter of concern to me if it were scripturally restricted to the Berean fellowship. An assembly of Bereans seeking a way to preserve and strengthen the unity and health of the Berean fellowship within the framework of established and historic Christadelphian belief, could be helpful, if it did not try to legislate.

But a conference of Bereans who admittedly have various shades of view on this matter (it never in the past having been thought wise to make it a universal First Principle) -- a conference of such with a group which has separated itself from us, has changed its Statement of Faith, has unilaterally added dogmas of fellowship contrary to the (I believe) sound teachings of bre Thomas and Roberts, has spread untrue-rumors and charges about Berean brethren and ecclesias--such a conference, I can only feel with a heavy heart, is fraught with great danger and little promise.

I do fervently pray that God in His love and wisdom will bring good out of it. And indeed, in the larger, ultimate view, we know He will, for "ALL things work together for good to them that love God." But if we take an unwise course, sometimes we have to experience sorrows that could have been avoided.

I do not wish to press the point, but I must express my personal conviction (with bro Gibson) that for those to take part in this Berean conference who have separated from us and set up new rules of fellowship, is not only unwise but unscriptural.

But seeing this is the course events are taking, I would plead with all Bereans taking part to listen to all, to ask all questions possible, but not to be swayed from the original sound Christadelphian foundation laid by our pioneer brethren. And above all not to make any decisions under pressure of time and persuasion. Let us get this sordid subject back into its true, healthy, Christadelphian perspective. Do not be swayed from this by those with whom it is an obsession.

And please do not believe any rumors or evil reports about anyone (on either side) without checking directly with the accused. And note very carefully those who make such reports, that you may be guided as to an assessment of their characters and credibility in other things. I have had things come back to me about myself that I find it very difficult to consider anything but deliberate fabrication. Some were told, for instance, that I was an alcoholic. Whatever faults I may have, or ever have had, this charge has absolutely not one scintilla of truth. I just mention this to illustrate what some can quite conscientiously do to promote what they believe to be the Truth. I would not doubt their basic motives, but we must be on guard against being influenced against our brethren by such things. I have been greatly saddened by this aspect of the present controversy.

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I have read your letters to bre Jackson and Sargent (this past weekend in London). I found them very interesting and enlightening as to the motive behind the Richard Resolution. If this had been explained, I believe both your Resolution and your ecclesia would have been better and more sympathetically understood.

I did not get opportunity to study either of your letters quietly or thoroughly. Therefore all I say is tentative. Bro Dave Clubb is making and sending me copies, but I do not have them yet. When I get them, I would like to comment on them in detail -- not in any way critically, but as a matter of brotherly discussion. (This will at earliest be after Texas). Your letters are very encouraging as reflecting careful thought and analysis and not shallow dogmatic assertion. With this process, progress toward unity can be made, as each side helps the thought processes of the other.

At this time, I would like to make a few observations from my brief perusal of your letters. First of all, I could say quite freely that I am in agreement with what I take to be both the spirit and the substance of the vast bulk of what you have written -- say 90% or more. But I cannot agree with the conclusion you draw -- that the Richard Resolution is the solution (or even a solution) to our problem, for several reasons-

1. It would never be universally accented. The only possible result of its general adoption would be division, not unity.

2. It is clear (to me) that you yourself, like many others (including myself) when faced with an actual flesh-and-blood case of apparently sincere repentance, could not conscientiously apply the Richard Resolution of irrevocably barring the door, for the sake of ecclesial "peace."

I know the San Angelo case. I know the persons involved. I know many of the secondary ramifications. There are truly many things, past and present, that one would wish to be different. I make no defense of many things. But the case has greatly strengthened my conviction that the R.R. is impractical and unscriptural, especially as here is a case in which, if bre Thomas and Roberts were right, there was no divorce-related sin by the brother at all God's way is always to leave the door openable, and to bring good out of evil. Man's way is so often to very well-meaningly perpetuate and compound the evil. The R.R. solution does not put the evil out, and keep the inside "pure." Rather it fosters the growth of a potentially greater and more subtle evil within. I am sure (from reading your letter) you well know the danger I refer to. What most impressed and affected me in the San Angelo case was the children involved -- 2 very nice little boys. The Clapham "solution" (which some among us urged) would deny them a mother. The Richard solution would (perhaps not theoretically, but in actual practice) deny them an upbringing in the ecclesial atmosphere of the Truth. The bre Thomas and Roberts solution (based on the Exceptive Clause) would provide them both, or at least be an encouragement rather than a barrier to both. Give this aspect a lot of thought. This is the living spirit, as against the dead letter of Pharisaism.

3. You make clear in your own developed line of reasoning in your letters that down the path of the Richard Resolution (hereafter R.R.) lies cold and rigid technical Pharisaism, and increasing legislative deadness. You well realize that legislation does not cure sin. Only love does that, and love -- if it is strong and joyful and pure -- is not afraid of contamination by the reception of repentant sinners. It is only a dying love and a waning zeal that needs to so protect itself against the acceleration of its own collapse.

In 1957-60, in connection with the Berean Restatement, a thorough attempt was made to persuade the Berean fellowship to adopt the substance of the R.R. as binding upon the whole Body -- to put out any "offenders" (those whom anyone thought to be offenders) and to bolt the door. This way, it was thought, we were going to guarantee our holiness and purity. Some ecclesias, as Hawley, Whangarei, Papakura, Lampasas, etc. (for which I now fervently thank God) vigorously opposed the imposition of this stand on the whole Brotherhood, and it was obvious that to force it would mean division. This is even more true today, for many more increasingly perceive the dangers mentioned in #3 above. The experience of 1957-60 is why I have known from the beginning that it would be impossible to unite the Berean fellowship by use of the R.R.

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Regarding the "Berean position" of the past, you say in your letters that you reached the conclusion (I go by memory) that it comprised-

1. Not to make this issue a matter of fellowship.
2. Every case to be handled according to its own merits.
3. The Brotherhood to "honor" the Los Angeles decision.

4. "Take action" against any ecclesia that does not do #3.

Note that #4 is in contradiction to #1 & #2. If it is not to be made a matter of fellowship, this cannot be reconciled with insisting on one course on pain of disfellowship. And if each case is to be handled according to its own merits, this cannot be reconciled with enforcing one standard solution for all.

I believe, therefore, it is apparent there is a discrepancy somewhere in interpreting the Berean position of the past. And I believe this is partly due to misinterpretation of the meaning of #3, and partly due to the inconsistencies and ambiguities and (I believe we could say) contradictions of the historic record itself.

I believe #3 is misunderstood. To "honor" and "abide by" the L.A. decision is simply to accent L.A.'s decision for L.A.'s case, but not to impose this rule arbitrarily on all other ecclesias in their own cases. This is "each case handled on its own merits" by its own ecclesia. To impose the L.A. formula on all ecclesias would make #1 and #2 meaningless.

Hawley, Whangarei, Lampasas, etc. "honored" L.A.'s decision by accenting it and leaving the responsibility (a very heavy one) to the L.A. brethren for refusing, on the grounds of "peace," to accept repentant sinners. (May God have more mercy on them and on us!)

But these ecclesias would never have accepted this "solution" as binding on themselves in their own cases. This was brought out very vividly in 1957-60.

However, there is some justification for your conclusion in #4. Some statements by bro. Denney do seem to support it.

Bro Denney (the actual, on-the-spot editor in England producing the magazine, and bro Dowling (the US editor) were not entirely agreed on the issue. Bro. Dowling's beliefs (I believe the correct ones) are very clearly and repeatedly emphasized in Clapham Change and Clapham Folly.

You will have noted that bro Gibson and I have kept this issue entirely out of the magazine. We have tried to be very careful not to use the magazine to propagate, support or promote our own views. We regard the magazine, not as a personal instrument, but as the voice of the Brotherhood. If and when the Brotherhood freely and without coercion decide unitedly upon any further stands or statements on this or any other question, then will be the time to publish such in the magazine. But as long as there are diversities of view, and no official fellowship stand, we do not believe the magazine should be used in the interests of any particular view.

Going back to the "Berean position of the past," I know personally that bre Dowling and Sommerville did not agree with the L.A. "Solution," and while they "accepted" it (for L.A., on L.A.'s responsibility for their own case), they would never have accepted it as imposed on the whole Body for all cases. I know this very clearly because at the time I did not agree with them, and I thought their beliefs were loose and dangerous. I favored the substance of the R.R. on the grounds that those who commit such things (whether innocent or guilty as far as the actual act was concerned) did so on their own responsibility,

knowing they would upset the Body, and therefore should get out and accept the responsibility without troubling the Brotherhood.

It was many years before I came to realize that this sounded fine theoretically and "solved" all "problems," but that it was a flight from reality as far as we ourselves and the applications of the principles of Christ were concerned. By study and experience, I came to thankfully realize that Bre Dowling and Sommerville were right and deeper in their comprehension of the spirit of the Truth in sticking to the original position of Bre Thomas and Roberts.

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Your basic line of justification for the R.R. solution is on the issue of "offence." I agree wholeheartedly with much of the argument you use, but I cannot accept your conclusion. I believe the same argument could be used even more cogently to reach the opposite conclusion.

For this (offence) argument to be valid as a basis of fellowship, it (1) must first be openly accepted among us as a basis of fellowship in all matters, which it never has been, and (2) it must be applied universally and without discrimination, and I might add a (3) that those who seek to apply this to others in the divorce matter must be the very first and foremost to submit themselves to it in their own lives. I refer to such things as sisters cutting their hair. They know it gives offence to many. Let them first show their deep concern for this "offence" principle themselves. Then let them concern themselves about others.

We cannot use this principle at our own convenience for just one offence and not for others. I do not find the divorce sinners particularly anxious to make new fellowship rules for others, but sadly I do find sisters who unscripturally cut their hair quite eager to make fellowship rules for others.

If the Body is ready to openly adopt the "offence" principle, and if all who are "concerned" about divorce are ready and eager to manifest in their own lives and conduct their devotion to this principle, it would truly indicate a great step upward in the Body's whole plane of thought and recognition of responsibility.

You reply that the sphere and range of its application must be in proper proportion to the extent of the area of the offence. That is (I take you to mean), if only one brother is offended, then the principle applies in dealing with this one brother: eat meat offered to idols, but do not do it when, where and if it could give him offence -- and whoever disobeyed this should be put out. And if one ecclesia is offended, do not do it within that ecclesia, or when and where it would trouble that ecclesia. And whoever disobeyed this should be put out. And if it is a fellowship-wide concern (which is the category you put the divorce question in), then let anyone be put out who gives anyone offence in the matter.

Again, I agree with you in principle and in theory. But practically, as applied to your suggested solution of this problem, I cannot agree. Nor could I see how the reasoning could be applied -- as an enforced fellowship issue -- to any one problem (as divorce) without consistently embracing all problems (as sisters' hair, etc), for (at least) 2 reasons-

1. Specifically: Hawley, the New Zealand ecclesias, Lampasas, etc., were so "offended" in 1957-50 by the attempt to enforce the R.R. solution on the whole Body that to have done so would have driven them from the Berean fellowship. So the "offence" argument is double-edged in this case. We are forced to choose between offending brethren and ecclesias whose stand is scriptural and brethren and ecclesias who stand is not scriptural.

2. Generally: Some ecclesias and individuals are high in conviction and low in agitation. Some are the opposite. So the evaluation of the area of the "offence" on which your reasoning rests is at best subjective and deductive, and not concrete and measurable. I feel as strongly about sisters cutting their hair as some do who keen agitating about divorce. But if I and others do not constantly agitate i "offence," who is to measure its relative range and intensity?

Again, another point: You say, in cases of "offence," we must adopt the "stricter" position, for the peace of all, and to "give the Truth the benefit of the doubt." Again, theoretically, I must agree. But what is the "stricter" view, and which side of the controversy is to define it? AE 7 how do we define "stricter" in scriptural things--by God's rules or man's?

Does it meas. "harsher, less loving, less forgiving," or does "stricter," scripturally defined, mean in closer harmony with Scripture? If there is a doubt, a disagreement, a division of opinion, an uncertainty, which is the more strictly Christlike course: to bar brethren out, or to receive them in?

Clearly our view of what is "stricter" (closer to divine perfection) will obviously depend upon our view of what is scriptural and correct, so I do not believe we can escape from facing the decision and the problem by simply agreeing (in theory) to adopt the "stricter" stand.

These are all the points that occur to me from your letters. I will study them when I get copies, and, God willing, write further when I get opportunity. I was very interested to read your letters, as they give evidence of much constructive thought seeking solutions without dogmatism. As a result I am much more encouraged as to overall prospects. Please accept all I have said in the same non-dogmatic and non-legislative spirit.

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Just a word in conclusion, just as expressing my own view, with no desire to be dogmatic or to legislate for others, or even to press upon others any particular view. I just speak as of something that has heled me to see the picture and have peace in my mind on the question.

I am convinced, like bre Thomas and Roberts, that the Exceptive Clause is the key to the problem. Not as a license to do anything, not as the opening of any doors to looseness and corruption, but as a solution to all the otherwise insoluble problems and complications this issue can create when Cod's commands are violated.

I am convinced that we must accept repentant sinners, and that we cannot as a fixed principle demand that they separate from the second partner (which is a further evil) In some matters the clock just cannot be turned back. Things done cannot be undone, and to try to do so only compounds tragedy.

Now, to my mind, this course (of reacceptance with second partner if the circumstances justify it) is only scripturally justifiable by recognizing the Exceptive Clause as bre Thomas and Roberts did. The divine command is: One partner for life. Any violation of that is deadly sin. BUT--when this command has been broken, either by unscriptural "divorce" or by whoredom (porneia), then the Exceptive Clause comes in to help us determine present relationships.

I doubt if anyone would ever be justified in initiating divorce on the basis of the Exceptive Clause, for the principle of forgiveness and reconciliation takes preeminence as long as further actions have not made reconciliation impossible. (I say I "doubt" because only God knows all possibilities and eventualities).

Certainly if any suing at law is involved, then no brother or sister could ever initiate divorce. I emphasize this (though it should not be necessary to mention), because some have unjustly accused Bereans of condoning suing at law.

In 1947-48, negotiations between Bereans and Central for Reunion broke down on the issue of suing at law. I am sure all Bereans knew about this. Then in 1953, a few years later, the majority of Bereans flocked into suing-at-law Central, and stopped their ears when remonstrated with. So the Berean fellowship is the last group that should be charged with a condoning suing at law -- especially by some now making the charges. But this is a side issue.

Getting back to the main point: I have no desire to press the Exceptive Clause. I have no desire to even discuss it, unless discussion is desired. I pray it may never need to be given any practical consideration. But I am convinced that if anyone desires to be sound and clear in their own mind on this matter, it must come (like bre Thomas and Roberts) by a recognition of the Exceptive Clause, which cannot be expunged from Scripture, and which must be accepted in its simple, obvious meaning, as bre Thomas and Roberts accepted it.

I personally was not able to accept the concept of receiving back repentant sinners with second partners until I could accept bre Thomas and Roberts' teaching on the Exceptive Clause -- that it recognizes, and makes healing provision for, a tragic situation that has been created by sin and unfaithfulness. God faces the issue, and makes merciful provision: man tends to dogmatize unrealistically.

Finally: I would ask any third person reading this letter not to take anything I have said as your (bro Ed Truelove's) beliefs or statements, but only my understanding and recollection of them. In no case have I quoted direct, but only by memory, not having your letters before me. For your beliefs and statements, I urge all interested to write to you direct.

With much love in the Truth to yourself, and to sister Delma, and to all in Richard,

Sincerely your brother,

Rene