

October 3, 1971.

The Richard Berean Christadelphian Ecclesia, in an earnest attempt to avoid a disastrous breakup of the Berean fellowship, submit this recommendation in regard to a condition bordering on division, caused by the acts of divorce and remarriage.

RECOMMENDATION TO BEREAN ECCLESIAS:

That each ecclesia re-endorse and include in their position of fellowship Article #6 of the Berean Restatement, according to the May 1965 Berean, page 148, as follows:

"In relation to the brethren and sisters of Christ:

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) her husband.' Matt. 19:6

'But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. And let not the husband put away his wife.' I Cor. 7: 10 & 11

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

In view of the above, and to prevent division, we recommend that any brother or sister remarrying after divorce should be asked to accept the responsibility of their position, and not expect acceptance in fellowship.

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Regarding alien marriage we believe that the marriage of a believer ought to be "only in the Lord". There can be no true and lasting bond between an unbeliever and a believer; they are diverse in purpose and hope. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" "Be not unequally yoked together with an unbeliever." For these and many more Scriptural reasons, marriage with an alien must be shunned.

In relation to this subject of alien marriage, Bro. Thomas in Elpis Israel page 119 states: "The serpents (Cainites) had become so harmless, and even pious, under the influence abroad, and were withal so fair to look upon, and so enchanting in their ways, that the Sethites took them into their bosoms, and cherished them with the affection of their own flesh. 'They saw', says Moses, 'that the daughters of men were fair; and they took wives of all they chose.' This was a fatal step. Can a man take fire into his bosom and not be burned? The sons of God corrupted themselves in marrying the daughters of Cain. Instead of bringing them over to 'the Way of the Tree of Life', they were beguiled into 'the Way of Cain'. For the sons of God to marry the daughters of Belial is to jeopardize their fidelity to God. This practice has ever been fruitful of apostasy."

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Our aim and purpose of this recommendation is to provide a common ground and framework whereby we may all work together in unity toward our common goal in Christ. It is not the purpose of this recommendation to create division upon uncertainties, nor is it our desire to unite upon a compromise of any of the primary principles of God's Truth which has become the heart of our life's purpose and direction. It is not our aim, nor do we feel it our duty, however, to legislate upon the brotherhood what is right or wrong concerning divorce and remarriage.

Whenever and wherever this subject arises, the brotherhood becomes enveloped in an aura of controversy, confusion, and misunderstanding which eventually wreaks havoc in the ecclesial world. Bro. R. Roberts, commenting upon the danger of going too far in our demands upon fellow-believers, states: "We live in a world of extremes of all kinds. It is difficult for any length of time to maintain an equilibrium in the application of any principle on account of the disbalances of mind so prevalent in the population, and the tendency of men to drive each other into extravagant positions through the sheer friction of personal antagonisms. This is probably more manifest in the Truth than in anything else, because of the obligation to make a firm stand which arises out of the Truth, as it arises out of nothing else. When men differ about the Truth, their differences are more unappeasable than in any other subject, because of the greatness of the interests involved and an earnestness of purpose and a depth of affection created by the Truth, as by nothing else. It was not without a reason that Jesus foretold division as the result of his appearance - division so keen that 'a man's foes should be they of his own house'."

Rarely, if ever, is the matter resolved without division. The misunderstanding, discouragement, and personal feelings which almost always seem to follow in the wake of division, have the effect of erecting an invisible but insurmountable barrier between factions of a fellowship which has become torn apart by the controversial nature of this subject and yet are of one mind on the important matters, the "things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ".

We recognise our duty to maintain the truth in its purity, and will endeavor to perform our duty to the point of disfellowship whenever a primary principle of truth is in question or jeopardized in its effect in any way whatsoever. On the other hand, we feel a deplorable condition has settled upon the brotherhood when a subject upon which no satisfactory collective answer can be given, should become the cause of division in the body of Christ.

It is a grave possibility, that if everyone were to press their views on this matter to the extreme, the Berean fellowship would practically disintegrate. We are of the opinion that if such were to take place, a grievous crime would be perpetrated...far exceeding the crimes of adultery and fornication in its comprehensiveness. Surely, such a crime would be extremely difficult to justify before Christ. Surely, this must not be allowed to happen! Again we quote Bro. Roberts timely statement: "So much of division is inevitable, and while lamenting it, men of God can but submit, with as little asperity towards those who cause it as possible. But there are divisions that are uncalled for, and therefore sinful. Paul refers to such when he says: 'Mark them that cause divisions among you contrary to the doctrine (the teaching on unity) that ye have learnt' Rom 16:17. He was referring, no doubt, to the factions arising out of personal preferences but the warning applies to all divisions that ought not to be made. There is division enough in all conscience - division that is inevitable - division that must be, unless we are to ignore divine obligations altogether; but there are divisions that ought not to be. It is possible to go too far in our demands on fellow-believers. How far we ought to go and where to stop, is at one time or other a perplexing problem to most earnest minds. We are

sorry for all the brethren affected by the varying tactics of error (for this is an error of action of a very serious character; if it is not an error of doctrine). It is an offence against the little ones believing in Christ, of which he expressed such great jealousy. It may be forgiven as Paul's persecution of the disciples was forgiven; but for the time being, it is a grave offence which we refuse to share. How perfectly melancholy it seems in the presence of the real work of the Truth."

We plead with our brethren and sisters everywhere to thoroughly weigh these statements in their minds. Perhaps in this case as in no other, we have the opportunity afforded us to exercise the precept "judge righteous judgement".

Due to the uncertainty and controversy surrounding this subject, we feel we can go no further than the position taken by many former Berean ecclesias.

The purpose of this recommendation, which is basically the former Berean position soundly and consistently adhered to up to the present time, is to prevent what we feel is the much greater crime overtaking the brotherhood.

The conclusions we have arrived at and used as the principles underlaying our recommendation are not exclusively our own. In support we would quote from three Berean brethren.

"As far as I am concerned, also others who have made the same statement, the only satisfactory solution to the problem, is that Bro. ___ should be told he should agree to stand aside from fellowship with us, and accept the responsibility of his position himself. Only Christ can judge Bro. ___ position righteously at the judgement seat, to ask the brethren and sisters in the Berean fellowship to judge this matter, would be asking them to accept responsibility beyond their ability to correctly assess the scriptural answer in unity with one another. The brethren and sisters should not be forced to have to decide on such a hard situation. In the event Bro. ___ would do this, and refrain from disturbing the ecclesias with his problem, this might save the situation from a serious result. In a similar problem in a Berean Ecclesia, in the past, the ones who have divorced and remarried were asked to refrain from the emblems at the table of the established assembly. The ones who had committed the offence have stood aside to this present day. This answer resulted in the brethren and sisters not suffering from the acts of the offenders, who still attend the meetings." J. Randell, March 22, 1971.

"My general belief about divorce is that it is a part of the world, and Christadelphians should not partake of it for we are commanded to be separate from the ways of the world. For years I have said that if a brother intends to get a divorce, he should be told plainly by the arranging brethren of the ecclesia that if he does obtain it, he should be prepared to assume the full responsibility, and not try to place it on the ecclesia by applying for refellowship. I look upon divorce as the moral cancer of our day, and it is eating the very vitals out of the brotherhood." G. Gibson, May 22, 1971.

"I have been firmly convinced for years that the only practical stand is that taken by the Toronto ecclesia; any who deliberately after baptism choose to break the commands of God in this matter should be asked to take the responsibility and stand before the judgment seat. I would not judge them, but to receive them back into fellowship would unquestionably split apart sincere brethren and sisters who would not themselves think of

committing this corruption." G.V. Growcott, September 22, 1969.

"I believe our course has been consistent and quite well agreed -- to ask them to stand aside and accept the responsibility rather than divide the Brotherhood. It is certainly a long-planned and premeditated sin, committed in full knowledge of the consequences. It is not an entirely satisfactory solution, but it is the only practical one that has been developed. If I saw any tendency to break it down I would begin to get concerned, but until such time I would prefer to rely on prayer for deliverance from such, rather than stir up feeling and argument by trying to impose legislation." G.V. Growcott, January 20, 1970.

It is not our intention to enforce upon the brotherhood any new foundation of belief on this matter, but merely to endorse, reiterate and emphasize our former position as found in the Berean restatement and in resolutions passed by various Berean ecclesias.

Despite what one may actually believe concerning divorce and remarriage, we feel the trend should be to discourage a believer from taking any action which may have the effect of once again plunging the brotherhood into a controversy which could possibly result in the premature disruption and ultimate premature extinction of the light of the truth in this dispensation. For this reason, we feel it should be esteemed as unthinkable by any brother or sister to advise or teach a believer something, which, if such teaching is put into practice, will effect such undesirable and disastrous developments.

We do not deny the gravity of the responsibility associated with the course of action we have recommended. Upon careful consideration it perhaps is not nearly so grave as some would deem it to be, nor is it by comparison nearly as grave as the responsibility to be shouldered concerning the lost and bewildered cries of those "little ones", the "babes" in Christ, who are in need of the sincere milk of the word. Such are not able, nor should they be asked, to differentiate between the forensic technicalities of such an involved subject. These may possibly become the innocent victims were a decision forced upon them.

We must remember that our judgement in a matter such as this is only provisional and very limited, and therefore even though a believer may be asked to refrain from partaking of the emblems in the assembly for reasons which have been stated, much spiritual help every other way can be extended, with the hope that we may once again be fully united in the kingdom when the ONLY righteous judge will quench all doubts and difficulties. Surely little or no blame can be attached to either way of thinking concerning a subject which is at best questionable in the only record we possess of God's word, providing the matter is not allowed to attain to a degree of pressure and urgency out of all proportion to its significance, which is minute indeed when considered in relation to the magnitude of our calling in Christ Jesus, and the REAL urgency and intensity of the work of the truth which lies ahead if Christ tarries.

It is our most sincere belief that we have, in the outline of this recommendation, chosen the course of action on this matter wherein lies the least responsibility, and the greatest spiritual good and welfare to all concerned. We plead for help and support as we humbly submit this recommendation to the brotherhood for consideration and constructive criticism. May we all unite together and in common gratefully accept the task of maintaining spiritual life as long as possible in a diminishing household of faith.