

Because of the year this article was written, it would seem rather apparent that Brother Thomas was sounding the trumpet to gather out of the Campbellite movement all of those people who were in agreement with him. You might recall that originally it was agreed to disagree on those issues that he and Alexander Campbell differed on. It was not felt at that time, that anymore than the basic statement of the Atonement, which was taught by Alexander Campbell, was necessary for salvation. Therefore, all could fellowship each other. However, when Brother Thomas came to the understanding of The Truth which compelled him to be baptized again, he realized the necessity of separating out from the Campbellites all who were like-minded. This understanding and objective are quite clearly set out in this article. It was to these people this article went. In addition, as we have said and put in print previously, it was because of this development, and the urgency of the situation due to the belief of the soon return of The Lord Jesus Christ, that Brother Thomas travelled to the various Campbellite congregations in America and Great Britain to bring about the separation of his followers from them. In this manner, ecclesias would be formed and the fellowship which would become known as the Christadelphians came into existence. Now, let us consider this article in detail.

Fellowship

BY BROTHER JOHN THOMAS

“That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly, our fellowship (is) with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” —(1 John 1:1-3)

Written in 1847 and Reprinted in The January 1994 “Berean” Magazine

Fellowship By Bro. John Thomas

1 Thus writes one of the Apostles, showing the true ground and importance of christian fellowship, or partnership. We ought, therefore, to understand the things declared by the Apostles, in order to enjoy society with them, and with the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ.

Notes By Bro. Julio B. Scaramastro

In paragraph one, Bro. Thomas, after quoting 1 John 1:1-3, establishes how very important the doctrine of fellowship is to enjoy the association of the Apostles, The Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice the use of such terms as, **“the true ground”** (Note the use of the definite article—he did not say “a true ground.” Obviously, there can not be a variety, or multitude, or more than one “true ground”!), **“importance”** (Not unimportant! It is a doctrine that is not to be taken lightly, or of little, or no value. When you use the word “importance,” it places an urgency on and emphatic attitude towards the subject matter. It is not something to toy with, but to be carried out immediately. It is something that must be carried out, or known, as in this case.), **“we ought to understand the things declared by the Apostle in order to enjoy society”** (He did not say that you had a choice, or that you could do it if you wanted. It is pointed out that it is necessary to understand the one and only true ground of fellowship taught by the Apostles in order to enjoy fellowship with them, The Father, and The Son. There is no other way to enjoy this fellowship.) Notice, in addition, that the terms **“fellowship,” “partnership,”** and **“society”** are used synonymously of each other, and as expressive of the same special relationship.

Isn't it remarkable that Bro. Thomas should insist on knowing the “true ground” of fellowship in the same year in which he was baptized? Doesn't this article absolutely destroy the claims of those who have said, and are saying, that he did not understand this doctrine prior to his baptism? Obviously, it does! Of course, this is exactly what we have maintained all along and labored to establish in our letter entitled “A Matter of Fellowship” (Copies, of

2

Let us attend to a primitive and a well instructed disciple, expressing himself very emphatically and summarily, with reference to the same things. Thus he writes:

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the Word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightiest know the certainty of those things wherein thou has been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).

3

From this passage of Luke, in connection with his account of the things testified concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, it is clearly of vast importance, that we labor for a *perfect understanding of all things as from the first, as things delivered by eye-witnesses, and ministers of the Word.* It is this perfect understanding, which is symbolically styled *light*, and in which when we walk, we have fellowship with God.

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7).

4

The Apostles, and the Holy Spirit and the Father, all witness concerning Jesus, all have partnership or society in him and with all his.

which, are freely available to any desiring them.) which was sent out to the Bereans who, unfortunately, have taken such an incorrect stand. We hope that this article will remind them of this incorrect stand, and have those involved in promoting this viewpoint placing a letter in *“The Berean”* magazine renouncing this position. It is best to establish a correct position, now, before the Lord returns, for then it will be too late.

In paragraphs two and three, Bro. Thomas continues to emphasize how important this doctrine is for all true believers. He refers to Luke as **“a well instructed disciple”** and then quotes Luke 1:1-4 in which he picks up and draws our attention to the phrase, **“perfect understanding of all things.”** The reason for this emphasis on having an accurate and complete knowledge of **“the things concerning the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ”** is driven home for it is stated to be the symbolical **“light”** which it is necessary to walk in to have fellowship with God. He then cites 1 John 1:5-7 for support of this point. In this passage are the very important words, **“but if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.”** In other words, unless we are walking in the light, which means that you can not be walking with darkness for the two conditions are mutually exclusive, the atonement can not operate! What a terrible position to be in! How important it is to be found in the light! How important it is not to be found walking with or in darkness! (To walk with darkness must mean that your light has been put out for darkness can not exist where light is found! We must pay attention to the properties of the natural when drawing the symbolical or spiritual lessons from it. There would be no use to introduce a figure of speech and then say that it does not apply! How foolish it would be to do something like that! It would make a proper interpretation of the Word of God impossible.)

In addition, in drawing our attention to the phrase, **“perfect understanding of all things,”** it is important to note that little word **“all.”** The spirit that produced the account in Luke did not say some, or many, but **“all!”** It is an absolute. Hence, Bro. Thomas in his use of this passage in the paragraph under consideration combines that with the impact of the opening part of the phrase **“perfect understanding”** to let us know that an accurate and complete (nothing missing—nothing left out—nothing distorted—not faulty—not partial) understanding of the Gospel message is essential for fellowship with God.

In paragraph four, we are informed that our partnership or society is found in Jesus along with all those who are his. Likewise, it can be said, that, if you are not found in him, then you are not his nor are you in partnership with any who are in him. Hence, it would be both unscriptural and wrong to maintain such a rela-

5 Now in view of these high and holy associations, can they who enjoy them get their own consent to pollute such associations by seeking communion with darkness?

Let us hear an Apostle, on this point, speaking thus:

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the Temple of God with idols? for ye are the Temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, etc.” (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

6 Surely, with these promises, we must advocate purity, individually and congregationally. Indeed, the apostle says—

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

7 Truly, such as have obeyed this injunction, are placed under the highest obligations to avoid all corruptions, and to contend, with all fidelity and boldness, for the faith, as formerly delivered to the Saints.

tionship with an individual in this class. If the Father, and Son will no longer associate with this individual, then why should we? Obviously, we not only can not, but must not, and will not!

In paragraph five, Bro. Thomas clearly establishes that any who enjoys this very special and unique relationship of fellowship with the Father, Son, and Apostles can not obtain consent amongst themselves to pollute this high and holy association. He cites 2 Cor. 6:14-16 to establish that it is against the Scriptures to seek communion with anyone who is not walking in the light, or who are in darkness. It then follows (paragraph 6) that we must advocate, teach, propound, promote the necessity of both individual purity, and collectively, congregational purity. In this manner, he leaves no one out from this injunction. We must all make sure that both we ourselves and the group we are part of are maintaining this doctrinal purity or the purity of the light so that our light is not put out with all the awful significance of that situation with respect to our eternal destiny. At this point, 2 Cor. 6:17-18 is cited to Scripturally emphasize the utmost importance of a saint remaining “separate” from and not touching “the unclean” in order for Yahweh to be a Father unto him and for him to be a son to Yahweh. Please note that the relationship known as fellowship is also known as that which defines family. You are either part of Yahweh’s family or you are not. Furthermore, outsiders, or non-family members, or those who are in darkness can not be acknowledged as such simply because we choose to for it is not ours to define the conditions of family, but He who is the head of the family. To put it in mundane terms, If the Jones are having a family reunion, then wouldn’t it be out of place for the Smiths to show up? Unquestionably, yes!

In paragraph seven, it is pointed out that all who have obeyed the Gospel message and have completely separated themselves from all defiling influences as discussed above are under “**the highest**” (not of no consequence, or unimportant, but extremely important. A superlative of comparison is used, for nothing is its equal, nor can anything else diminish it.) “**obligation**” (We do not have a choice in this. It must be carried out as required.) “**to avoid**” (We must stay away from, go nowhere near darkness, or, in the words of Prov. 4:14-15, “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.”) “**all corruptions**” (Again, we are presented with an absolute. It is not just some, or a few, or many, but “**ALL**” corruptions, or sources of darkness.). In addition to the above, such an one must be active in the upholdance, defence, and promotion of The Faith. We must do so “**with all** (Here is our absolute again being used. It is not just some, or a few, or many, but “**ALL**”.) **fidelity**” (faithfulness). In other words, nothing is left undone in our carrying out our responsibilities to the One Faith. Furthermore, it is done “**with all...boldness.**” Need it be brought to our attention what the use of the word “all” purports in this connection? For those who are obtuse, we will indicate that nothing must

8

It is not the approbation of any number of uninspired men, although called a church or congregation, which satisfies the enlightened man. He seeks the approbation of the High and Holy One, whether in regard to individuals or to congregations. It is evident that the first congregations were composed of individuals who had all submitted to baptism for the remission of sins in obedience to the Gospel of the Kingdom, divinely authorized. Even John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And certainly the Apostles were plain upon this point, as exemplified in Peter on the day of Pentecost. It is of the greatest importance to build according to divine injunction.

9

If I have received that which was from the beginning, as reported by the witnesses and the ministers of the Word, I am in society with the most illustrious personages in the universe. Shall I mingle myself with the congregations or collections of men and women partly purified and partly not purified, some of them not having obeyed? Are they not all defiled?

deter us from carrying out all requirements with respect to the One Faith or the maintenance of its fellowship. No matter how dark, or dreadful a situation may seem, we must carry these things out to the letter undaunted by whatever darkness may throw at us.

In paragraph eight, it is the approval of “**the High and Holy One**” that all true believers seek and not that of “**uninspired men.**” Our attention is directed to the true believers of the first century and their faithfulness to these principles and the urgency and importance to do likewise. Note the last sentence which says, “**It is of the** (definite article—No if, ands, or buts! No maybes! No uncertainties of any type!) **greatest** (A superlative of the highest magnitude. There is nothing greater, or its equal. There is nothing to diminish its importance, or give it a lesser status.) **importance** (It is something that can not be dismissed. It is something that is pressing, vital, and urgent. Something else can not be placed ahead of it, or cause it to be ignored. It can not be avoided, or diminished, or relegated to a lesser status.) **to build according to divine injunction** (Not by human judgment, discernment, or wisdom, but divine commandment or requirement. It is to be according to, or in harmony with, or in accord with Yahweh’s laws and not man’s. It must be at one with “in the light” and not intermixed with “darkness.”).

It must be categorically stated that Bro. Thomas is not using the term “**church**” in a characteristically Christadelphian fashion here. Therefore, we must consider its use in its context which equates it with the term “**congregation,**” and which context demands its application to the saints. Paragraphs five (which refers to a pure fellowship capable of being polluted, and thus not a church in its characteristically Christadelphian usage) and six (which refers to advocating purity individually and congregationally, which can not apply to a church in its typical Christadelphian usage) considered logically demands this fact. Only those who are stubborn and willingly blind would disagree.

In paragraph nine, it is emphasized that a person who has accepted the principles of “walking in the light” can not mix “**with the congregations** (Please note the plurality of the term! It is not just one congregation, but many. It is not limited to just your immediate group, but all the groups that make the association up. It transcends your local ecclesia, but includes all those which make up your fellowship.) **or collections of men and women** (Again, note all the terms are plural. It is everyone claiming membership in your fellowship, and not just a partial listing of individuals.) **partly purified and partly not purified, some of them not having obeyed** (That is, a collection of people, including some who have not obeyed, and others who are somewhere along a continuum between not having obeyed and having obeyed, which is indicated by “partly purified and partly not purified.” It is obvious that he is teaching that such a state of things can not exist in a fellowship that is founded on the principles that he is advocating and which are found in The Word. In other words, everyone in

10 The wisdom from above is *first pure, then peaceable*; God is pure, and He will not dwell with the impure. I would, ten thousand times rather be in society with the few purified ones than with the many *impure* ones. It is the truth obeyed which makes pure; let us then persevere in the doctrine of Jesus and know the truth and be purified or freed from sin by it. Let us study all the truth in the scriptures of inspiration, as being profitable, or able to profit, in doctrine, in conviction, in correction, in instruction, or training in righteousness.

11 When fully enlightened by these sacred studies, we shall in the ration of this light, enjoy fellowship, or society with all the enlightened sons of God, and with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. We shall then joyfully wait for the hope, which is predicated upon the righteousness by faith. We shall contemplate the future, as rendered unspeakably resplendent with the glory of God, in the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we shall be animated and strengthened unto all patience and all long suffering, and shall conquer through him, who has loved us, and more than conquered—being made stronger than all enemies—and shall obtain a triumph in honor of being conquerors—and enter abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

12 I am, I humbly trust, one of the sons of that liberty with which Christ makes his people free—the *liberty of the truth*.

13 Brethren, let us *do or die*.

—Herald, 1847

your fellowship must be found in the light or all are in darkness. There is no in-between position!). Bro. Thomas views this so-called in-between position very negatively for in regards to it he says, “**Are they not ALL** (Another absolute term! No one is excluded! Everyone is included! There are absolutely no exceptions! There are no extenuating circumstances!) **defiled.**” The implied answer is unquestionably, **YES!** This statement is a voice of warning to all those who are currently making excuses for the fellowships that they are in which fit this description. Bro. Thomas, and the Scriptures, and we plead with you to do something before it is too late.

In paragraphs ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen, we are absolutely overwhelmed by the conclusion of his article. It is emphasized that the wisdom which comes from above must first be pure for peace to follow. The Scriptures teach that there is no peace for the wicked. This is a constant refrain in Isaiah. If our fellowship is not founded on purity, then there can be no peace to be laid upon it. Obviously, this must be the reason for all the wrangling that is going on in some fellowships where darkness is permitted to dwell in their midst and members are taught that all they can do with it is fight with it until it decides to leave on its own!

It is then pointed out that “**God is pure, and He will not dwell with the impure.**” If we claim to be in fellowship with Him, or to be dwelling with Him, then, how can we dwell with those who are impure? Obviously, we can not! Purity and light are found together, and impurity and darkness are found together. There are no in-between states. Only the flesh seeks to define something in-between, and not the spirit. Bro. Thomas emphasizes that he would rather be in fellowship with a small number of purified ones than with a large company of impure ones. It is not quantity, but quality that is important. It is the difference between life and death. He then explicitly tells us that “**it is the truth obeyed which makes pure.**” Consequently, we are exhorted to commit ourselves to a detailed study of the Word and a correct application of the results of these studies to be the subject of this purifying process. As a result of being “**fully enlightened**” we will be walking in the light and enjoying fellowship with all enlightened sons of God, and with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. This family is the only family that is of value, and no one can be a part of it who does not fit the description of that which defines it. Bro. Thomas concludes with words which exhort to action and warns against inactivity, or an improper course, “**Brethren, let us do or die.**” It is up to us to choose our destiny and follow the path that leads to it. There are only two paths. The first is “walking in the light” which leads to life. The second is “walking in the darkness” which leads to death. How important it is, therefore, to choose the correct one. How important it is to be found walking with Elohim as Noah did in his time which is a type of ours. How important it is to realize that you can not be both walking with Elohim and darkness at the same time for Elohim is not found walking with darkness. How important it is to realize how important and urgent the doctrine of fellowship is to all who would be the Sons of Elohim?