

Fellowship Practice – A Biblical Study

Introduction

The intention of this document is to offer a scriptural examination of the principles of fellowship practice. It will also examine how they were practically followed by the early ecclesia, and how they relate to the ecclesia in the 21st century.

The principles of this subject are simple and can be summarized under two main headings:

- 1) The One Body
- 2) Dealing with Error in the Body

It will be seen that the “One Body” is a first principle doctrine, with clear and practical implications for both fellowship practice and the preserving of the one faith.

This article will conclude that fellowship¹, except for specific exceptions, should be extended to all who are regarded as being in the one body of the Christ as defined by the one baptism. The specific exceptions relate to when an individual, through continuing in immorality or refusing to stop teaching error, must be placed effectively outside the body (“delivered to Satan”) for their own good, as well as the ecclesia’s.

One of the responsibilities of fellowship is to be vigilant to preserve the one faith, by ensuring that false teachers are silenced, whilst patiently educating others in the one body that believe error or have been confused by it.

This document will conclude by looking at some of the Biblical passages that are wrested to justify a more factional model of fellowship, as well as answering some commonly asked questions.

1) The One Body

God Is One – The Implications

When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment he responded:

*The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! **The Lord our God is one Lord;** and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'*

Mark 12:30²

He starts by restating what is undoubtedly the first of the first principles. God is one. By connecting this principle to a commandment, he demonstrates that doctrine has practical implications. The fact that God is one has many consequences:

- **Malachi 2:10** – Not to deal treacherously with your brother
- **1 Timothy 2:1-7** – God wants all men saved. There is only one way to God which is why the Gospel must be preached to all.
- **Romans 3:29-30** – God is the God of the Jews and the God of the Gentiles
- **John 17:3, 11, 21-22** – Jesus’s disciples are to be one (just as God is one, and is one with his son).

All of these references, especially the last two, show that one implication of the unity of God is that he wants his people to be one as well. Whenever there is division among God’s people, God’s purpose is to

¹ The intention of this document is not to present a complete study of what “fellowship” (Greek: *Koinonia*) is. The word means “to share” and several good word-studies already exist – see for example George Booker’s “Biblical Fellowship.”

² All scriptural citations from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) unless otherwise stated.

reunite them (Genesis 2:24; 2Samuel 5:1-3; Isaiah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 3:18; 50:4; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Hosea 1:11; Zechariah 9:13)

Jesus Died to Make One Body

Jesus Christ shares this desire. One of the purposes of his sacrificial death was to make his disciples one:

I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd.

John 10:15-16

...Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

John 11:51-52

...that they may be one...that they may all be one...that they may be one...

John 17:11, 21-22

...have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in his flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in himself he might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Ephesians 2:13-16

One Body – A First Principle

The “One Body” that Paul told the Ephesians about in chapter 2 is a first principle. In the same letter Paul gives a condensed “statement of faith” that begins with “one body” and ends with “one God”:

***There is one body and one Spirit,
just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
one Lord, one faith³,
one baptism,
one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.***

Ephesians 4:4-6

Paul places a very high level of emphasis on the first principle of the one body:

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

But now there are many members, but one body.

1 Corinthians 12:20

There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all...And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

Colossians 3:11-15

³ Note also the association of one body with one baptism and one faith – this will be expanded on later.

He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, **but rather to one**, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

God is one.

For **all of you** who were **baptized into Christ** have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

Galatians 3:16, 20, 27-28

It should be clear from these passages that there is only one body, not many. This first principle has direct practical implications for behavior. It is also clear that a person is not "almost in the body". A person is either in Christ or not.

One Body = One Bread

One of the implications is that those who are in the one body are to act like they are a part of a body. When part of a person's natural body is sick or in need, they attend to its needs. A natural body will also share nourishment and rejoice together. The body of Christ should be no different (1 Corinthians 12:14-27).

The city-ecclesia of Corinth was wracked by division. It is in Paul's first letter to Corinth that he spends most of his time discussing the implications of being one in Christ, including the goal of developing one mind (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)⁴. Another implication is that the one body is to share the one bread:

*Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a **sharing**⁵ in the blood of Christ?*

*Is not the bread which we break a **sharing** in the **body** of Christ?*

Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body;

for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Note Paul's logic. It is taken as a given that there is one bread. The fact that there is one bread teaches or reminds the Corinthians that there is to be one body. The Corinthian ecclesia was divided into various factions or schisms. Just before introducing the commandment of the memorial supper, Paul says "I hear that divisions exist among you" (1 Corinthians 11:18). One of the purposes of sharing one table is to resolve division among brothers and sisters.

The principle is clear – **One Body = One Bread.**

This means that those who are of the one body are expected to share the one bread. Just as there is no concept of multiple bodies in scripture, likewise there is no concept of multiple or divided tables. The situation in Corinth was not to be praised (1 Corinthians 11:17). When such division occurs today, where some members of the one body exclude the table from others, it is also not commendable.

One Baptism = One Body – Who is in the One Body?

This leads to an obvious question. If the bread and cup are to be shared with members of the one body, who comprises the one body?

A connection has already been seen in Ephesians 4:4-6 and Galatians 3:16, 20, 27-28 between the one baptism and the one body. Paul makes this connection again when speaking to the ecclesia in Corinth:

*For even as **the body is one** and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, **are one body**, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit **we were all baptized into one body**, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

⁴ This point will be expanded on later.

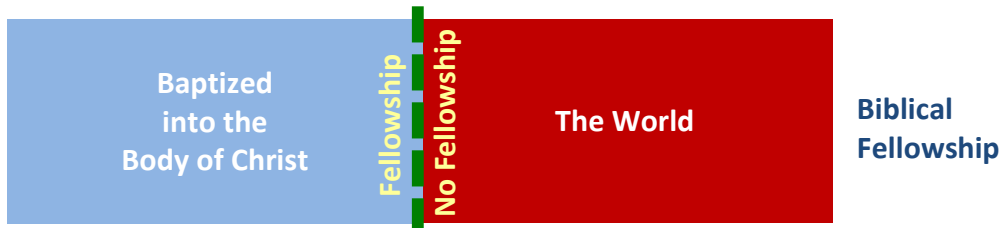
⁵ "Sharing" is the Greek word *koinonia*, usually translated "fellowship".

One Baptism implies One Body. This means that all those recognized⁶ as being baptized into Christ are part of the one body⁷ and therefore if it is not a requirement for an individual to be immersed again (as was required in Acts 19:1-5) then he or she ought to be treated as part of the one body. This includes sharing with them the one bread⁸.

To summarize:

One Baptism = One Body = One Bread

There is only one dividing line in scripture to distinguish people. This line separates those regarded as being in the body from those out. This same line also divides those who should share the table from those who should not:



Erroneous models of fellowship have two lines of separation – one for determining who is in the body, and another for determining who is to be extended fellowship at the Lord’s Table. Ecumenicalism says fellowship at the table should be extended to those not communally regarded as being baptized into the body of Christ. This is also known as “open-fellowship”:



The opposite error dictates that fellowship should not be extended to all who are viewed as in Christ. Scripture calls this “schism” or “Christ being divided” (1Corinthians 1:10; 11:18; 12:25). This reflects the current state of the brotherhood in North America:



The fellowship line in the above diagram should be moved to be the same line that divides the ecclesia from the world. Care must be taken though to not go from one extreme to another and go from schism to ecumenicalism.

⁶ “Recognized” is the key word here. There are many, like Baptists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, who have been immersed. Christadelphians do not recognize them as being baptized into Christ and so they are not regarded as part of the One Baptism.

⁷ It might be asked whether it is appropriate to assess whether we think a person is in the one body, or in need of baptism. The short answer is “yes, we must”. This will be expanded on in the questions section below.

⁸ There is one exception to this, regarding those who have been “delivered to Satan” that will be discussed in the section about dealing with error in the body

The balanced position is one that recognises that there is a gulf between Christ and the World and extends fellowship accordingly. There is no “in-between” or “grey zone” between those “in the World” and “in Christ” defining a third class of people who are regarded as being in the body, but are treated as if they are in the world. As seen above in Ephesians 2:13-16 there are only two categories. The previous verses show how far apart that estrangement is:

*Remember that you were at that time **separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.** But now in Christ Jesus you who **formerly were far off** have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Ephesians 2:12-13

1 John 1 also demonstrates the gulf between light and darkness:

*“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is **light**, and in Him there is no **darkness** at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and yet **walk in the darkness**, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we **walk in the light** as He Himself is in the **light**, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:3-7

These verses further underline the principle that there is no third state recognized in scripture between light and darkness. There is no sliding scale where a person can be regarded as being somewhat of the light, and somewhat of the darkness.

Fellowship is to be excluded from those whom Paul describes in Ephesians as being separate from Christ, excluded from the promises, without hope and without God. John uses equally stark language in his epistles, describing those who are not to be fellowshiped as not being in fellowship with the Father and son (1 John 1:3), walking in darkness and liars (1:6), antichrist (2:22), children of the devil (3:10) and of the world (4:5). A decision to suspend or deny fellowship to a person is an assessment that they are without God.⁹

Division in the Body of Christ

Although there are instances when it is necessary to suspend fellowship from an individual member of the body, the New Testament never speaks favourably of situations where groups or blocs of believers in the body divide. The very concept of a “fellowship” (like “Dawn Fellowship”, “Central Fellowship” or “Unamended Fellowship” etc.) is alien to scripture.

The New Testament always condemns such divisions.

Antioch

The first instance was in Syrian Antioch. It is worth looking at this in detail:

*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he **stood condemned**. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he **used to eat with the Gentiles**; but when they came, he began to **withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision**. And the rest of the Jews joined him in **hypocrisy**, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their **hypocrisy**. But when I saw that **they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel**, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the*

⁹ Some may ask, “is it right to assess if someone is in the body?” See Appendix B for an answer to this question.

Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?

Galatians 2:11-14

There are several points worthy of attention in this passage:

- It is specifically about fellowship practice – the reference to “eating with” likely refers to the sharing of the table.
- Peter (Cephas) personally believed it was acceptable to fellowship with his Gentile brothers and sisters (as he had learned earlier in Acts 10 when he preached to Cornelius).
- Fear of the “circumcision party” in Jerusalem led him to withdraw from the Gentile believers. This fear led others into following Peter’s separation. The “fear of men” is a powerful negative motivator to deter people from courageously doing what is right (see John 9:22; 12:42-43).
- Paul regarded this action as hypocrisy, liable to condemnation. It deserved and received a public rebuke.

Peter clearly regarded the Antioch ecclesia’s Gentile members as being in the body of Christ, and yet he stopped fellowshiping with them because of the fear of what others might think or say. Though his withdrawal was likely motivated by the good intention of hoping to not provoke discord in his home ecclesia of Jerusalem, Paul regarded it as a very serious error on the part of Peter who should have known better. Paul said his actions were not according to the truth of the Gospel.

The situation that nearly divided Antioch was then taken up at the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15. The temporary solution is found in Acts 15:19-21. Any solution that would have resulted in the formation of two separate groups of believers was clearly unacceptable.

Corinth

Perhaps the best known occurrence of division in the early ecclesia is in Corinth. Despite many serious errors in that ecclesia, Paul’s first priority is correcting the division:

*Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, **and there be no divisions among you**, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

*For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that **there are quarrels among you**.*

Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.”

Has Christ been divided?

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

The ecclesia in the city¹⁰ of Corinth had formed different factions or divisions (the Greek word is “schismata” from where the English word “schism” comes). Paul is adamant that this situation be reversed. It is unfortunate that today the word “fellowship” is used as a noun¹¹ to describe the various divisions that exist in the body of Christ. “Schism” or “Faction” are much more Biblical words.

¹⁰ It may be thought that the fellowship passages pertaining to Corinth are not relevant to inter-ecclesial fellowship, as Corinth was just one ecclesia with internal division. In fact they are very relevant. In the New Testament there is never a situation of more than one ecclesia in a city or region. When cities were very large or had thousands of believers, for practical reasons they would have met in multiple locations, but they were still regarded as a single ecclesia. It is unfortunate that this example has not been followed today. Instead of the modern paradigm of multiple autonomous ecclesias in a single city, there should be just one. The single “ecclesia that is in Toronto”, for example, would refer to all the brothers and sisters living in that region.

¹¹ In the New Testament, the word “fellowship” is primarily used as a verb, and nearly always in a positive context of the sharing those in the ecclesia have with God, Christ and each other. The use of the word “fellowship” to describe different groups of Christadelphians today is without scriptural mandate. The origin of this misuse is probably because

Has Christ been divided? To ask the question is to answer it.

Paul goes on to describe the schisms in that city-ecclesia as evidence they were of the flesh:

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to **men of flesh**, as to babes in Christ...for **you are still fleshly**. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, **are you not fleshly**, and are you not walking like mere men? **For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?***

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul also describes factionalism and schism as works of the flesh that should not exist in the body (1 Corinthians 12:25).

Despite this division, Paul instructs the ecclesia in Corinth to come together and remember the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:18, 23-26) discerning the Lord's body (v29) which is most likely a reference to the ecclesia¹². Some have said that being of one mind is a prerequisite to the fellowship or sharing of bread and wine. The example of Corinth demonstrates that this is not the case. Being of one mind is the intended end-result of fellowship, not the precondition.¹³

Diotrephes

A final example of a division amongst groups of believers is that instigated by Diotrephes:

*I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, **neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church.***

3 John 9-10

Diotrephes was not condemned by John for any particular false teaching. It was his desire for pre-eminence and his slander against John¹⁴ that John denounces. He compounded these sins by practicing what today is sometimes referred to as "daisy-chain" fellowship or guilt-by-association. It was bad enough that Diotrephes was unwilling to accept John's words, but he went two steps further in that:

1. he would not receive the brethren
2. he refused those who would receive them

This practice is no different to the current practice of refusing a brother or sister at the table, not for what he or she may believe, but entirely on the basis of whom else they might be fellowshiping in the body of Christ.

2) Dealing With Error in the Body

When confronting first principle error in the ecclesia, it has been assumed that only two options exist:

- 1) **Toleration** – One response is to not interfere and leave the error for the Lord to settle when he returns. This is justified on the basis of Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge, lest you be judged". When this approach is proposed it is often accompanied with a desire to show "love".

in the nineteenth century "fellowship" was used of organizations such as trade unions (where members call each other "brother") and is used today in a number of different contexts. The Biblical word for such a situation in the brotherhood is "factions" (Galatians 5:20).

¹² This conclusion is based on the the context of 1Corinthians 10 and 12 where the body is clearly a corporate reference to the ecclesia.

¹³ This point will be expanded on below in an examination of the misapplication of 1 Corinthians 1:10.

¹⁴ It may be surprising to note that John does not announce any discipline towards Diotrephes beyond an intention to publicly rebuke him when he next visits. There is no instruction to suspend fellowship with Diotrephes.

- 2) **Separation** – The alternate response is one of disassociation or “disfellowship” from all who hold wrong beliefs. Although it is accepted that some sort of process should be followed before the separation, it is claimed that after a certain amount of time separation **MUST** occur. If some do not also separate, they too are regarded as not holding to the first principles, and they will eventually be separated from also.

Both of these options represent extremes that ultimately show a lack of care for those under the influence of error in the ecclesia. It will be shown that these responses fail to account for two important principles taught in the Bible:

- 1) There is a difference between those who are false teachers and those who have been misled by, or tolerate false teaching.
- 2) There is a range of responses to error that can be used.

There is a better option than toleration or separation. This option can be summarized as “education”.

Teachers

Despite the egalitarian attitude that some hold regarding roles in the ecclesia there is a fundamental distinction taught in the Bible regarding the role of teaching. Those who teach are to be held to a higher level of responsibility:

*Let not many of you become **teachers**, my brethren, knowing that **as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.***

James 3:1

*Obey your **leaders**, and **submit to them** for they keep watch over your souls, **as those who will give an account.** Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.*

Hebrews 13:17

James in particular is clear that those who are teachers are to be held to a higher account, and they will receive a stricter judgment. This is true in the future at Christ’s return, but also now. The reason is that teachers are more responsible for others in the ecclesia.

The most severe forms of discipline that we read of in scripture are reserved for individuals who are guilty of teaching error. Consider the following examples:

- 1) The Old Testament response to false prophets is much more severe than the rest of the people:
 - a. False Prophets who enticed the people to go after other gods were to be executed. (Deuteronomy 13:1-11; 18:20)
 - b. Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40)
 - c. False prophets in days of Jeremiah set apart for severe judgment including death (Jeremiah 28:15-17; 29:21-22, 31-32)
- 2) Jesus in his ministry was especially scathing towards those who were to be teachers of the law but misled the people (Matthew 23). He specifically warned his disciples to be on the lookout for false teachers (Matthew 7:15-20)
- 3) Those who teach another gospel are to be accursed (Greek: “*anathema*”) (Galatians 1:8-9)
- 4) Peter was rebuked publicly for his actions in Antioch that Paul described as hypocrisy and were tantamount to teaching that Gentile believers should keep the law (Galatians 2:11-14)
- 5) Hymenaeus and Alexander, who were among those who thought they were teachers are delivered to Satan (1 Timothy 1:3-7, 18-20)
- 6) Timothy commanded to avoid men such as Hymenaeus and Philetus who were upsetting the faith of some by teaching the resurrection has past (2 Timothy 2:17)
- 7) False teachers are to be silenced (Titus 1:9-11)
- 8) Not to receive or even greet itinerant false teachers (2 John 7-10)

Examples could be multiplied, but these should suffice to show that false teachers are dealt with harshly, to the point of exclusion from the ecclesia. This is to protect the rest of the ecclesia as well as to bring the false teacher to repentance. False teaching is not to be ignored or tolerated.

Listeners

In contrast to the severe sanction of false teachers, the instruction of scripture regarding those in the body that are under the sway of false teaching, or are confused by it, is one of patient education.

There is no example or commandment in the New Testament to separate from those who believe error in the ecclesia. The correct response in these situations is to teach the truth to them, to restore them to the unity of the faith. Examples of this abound. In nearly all of the epistles, the apostles beseech, exhort, warn, charge, reprove and instruct the ecclesias under their care to return to the simplicity of truth.

The epistles instruct the same approach be used today:

*Brethren, even if a man is **caught in any trespass**, you who are spiritual, **restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness***

Galatians 6:1

*And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, **able to teach**, patient when wronged, with gentleness **correcting those who are in opposition**, if perhaps God may grant them repentance **leading to the knowledge of the truth***

2 Timothy 2:24-25

*My brethren, if any among you **strays from the truth**, and one **turns him back**, let him know that he **who turns a sinner from the error of his way** will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.*

James 5:19-20

*And have **mercy on some, who are doubting**; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.*

Jude 1:22-23

The motive in dealing with those in error must be restoration and education, not seeking reasons for separation. The example of God's dealings with Israel is very instructive. Despite falling repeatedly into the most loathsome forms of idolatry, God showed mercy for hundreds of years¹⁵, "Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all my servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. (Jeremiah 7:25). This example of patient education is just as applicable today.

Education at the Breaking of Bread

This principle of patient education is true even at the breaking of bread.

There is no evidence that those under the sway of false teaching were to be excluded from the Lord's Table. In fact the most detailed accounts given of the memorial supper are set in a context of believers who were struggling with an incomplete understanding of the basics of the gospel. Those examples are:

1) Jesus in the upper room

There is some debate whether Judas partook of the bread and cup or not. The evidence indicates that he at least took of the bread (John 13:18, 26). But even if he left the upper room first, he clearly was more than welcome to eat and drink. It is remarkable how much time Jesus spent

¹⁵ And even when God finally did execute judgment on especially rebellious generations, he continued to appeal to the children of those rebels to return to him.

appealing to Judas in the upper room to repent (Matthew 26:21-25; John 13:1-11, 18, 21-30). This demonstrates that the breaking of bread is an appropriate setting for appealing to those who are regarded as being “not clean” (John 13:11). It is not a prerequisite that all be of one mind.

Regardless of whether Judas participated, it is clear that the rest of the twelve were not doctrinally of one mind with the Lord in the upper room either. Not only were they busy squabbling over who was the greatest (Luke 22:24) and speculating who might be the betrayer (John 13:22) they were all ignorant of some of the basics of the gospel, despite three years of teaching by Jesus. They still did not understand that he was to die and be raised again! The basics of the Gospel can be summarised as the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. The disciples, as most Jews of the day, knew the first part well, but were deficient in their understanding of the latter. It was only after the resurrection that they came to a proper understanding of the things concerning the Christ (Luke 24:44-48). They also had other gaps in their understanding, such as a continuing belief in ghosts (Luke 24:37).

On this last night one might have expected the Lord to want to be alone, or spend time with those who did understand his impending death, but instead he devoted hours to teaching and edifying his confused followers (John 13-16), ultimately praying for them to become of one mind, as he was with his father (John 17). This first breaking of bread demonstrates that one purpose of the memorials is to strengthen and educate the ecclesia. One hundred percent agreement on doctrine is not a prerequisite to sharing the body and blood of the Lord amongst brothers and sisters.

2) Corinth

It is likely not a coincidence that the only other detailed account of the breaking of bread is contained in a letter to the 1st century ecclesia most troubled by division and confusion about the gospel. Consider the challenges Paul lists in 1 Corinthians:

- Denial of the resurrection (15:12)
- Superstition that demons were real and confusion regarding the oneness of God (8:1-13)
- Drunkenness at the memorial meeting (11:21)
- Brothers suing other brothers (6:1)
- Pride (5:2, 6) of one member’s incest (5:1)
- Sisters speaking (ch. 11, 14)
- Misuse (or fake use) of Holy Spirit gifts (ch. 14)

In this context, Paul reiterates the events in the upper room (10:16-17; 11:23-33). He uses the opportunity to exhort the ecclesia to develop unity and not continue to be in factions (11:18), to consider the body of Christ (10:17; 11:29) and to concern themselves with the needs of other (11:33) as per the example Jesus himself gave (Luke 22:24-27; John 13:1-17)

Both of these examples teach an important lesson. Oneness of mind and doctrinal purity are not a prerequisite for brothers and sisters sharing the one bread in fellowship. By contrast the breaking of bread was an opportunity to develop that oneness. The problems listed above in Corinth had to be addressed, but his strongest rebukes concern the factions in the ecclesia that were preventing them meeting as one.

Seven Ecclesias in Asia

The seven ecclesias in Revelation 2 & 3 also highlight the distinction between false teachers and the rest of the ecclesia.

The focus of rebuke is on those who are teaching error:

- You cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who **call themselves apostles**, and they are not, and you found them to be false (2:2)
- You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (2:6)
- You have there some who hold the **teaching** of Balaam (2:14)
- You also have some who in the same way hold the **teaching** of the Nicolaitans. (2:15)
- You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, **and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray** (2:20)

Some of these ecclesias were criticized for tolerating the occurrence of false teaching of the Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel. They were instructed to stop the false teachers. But despite being in ecclesias that “had a name that you are alive, but you are dead”, no one was told to leave their ecclesia, nor were ecclesias told to not fellowship with each other. Instead there is a strong emphasis on staying and trying to reverse the decline. In all of these ecclesias, it was possible that some could overcome:

*But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, **who do not hold this teaching**, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them-- I place no other burden on you. **Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.***

Revelation 2:24-25

*Wake up, and **strengthen the things that remain**...But you have a few people in Sardis **who have not soiled their garments**; and they will walk with me in white; **for they are worthy.***

Revelation 3:2-4

The ultimate discipline against ecclesias would be executed by the Lord Jesus Christ (2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:3, 16, 19) who walks among them (2:1). By contrast, his followers were to focus on restoration and renewal. It is no different today; the Lord Jesus is just as capable of removing lampstands when appropriate.

Hezekiah's Passover

Hezekiah's Passover is another example of the priority of education and appeal within the bond of fellowship at the breaking of bread, even if complete oneness of mind has not been fully attained yet.

In 2 Chronicles 30:6-9 an appeal is made by Hezekiah and Judah to their northern brethren to repent. Some rejected the appeal but others accepted the invitation to come to Jerusalem and share the Passover. This Passover was not performed according to the exact requirements of the law:

- v15 – it occurred in the 2nd month
- v17 – many in the assembly had not consecrated themselves
- v18 - many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover even though they were not properly prepared.

Despite these flaws, this Passover was perhaps the most joyous and blessed in the history of Israel because the outstanding feature was one of restoration. It was extended an additional week (v23). Hezekiah also used the opportunity of this Passover for teaching “good insight in the things of the LORD” (v22).

One lesson¹⁶ of this event is that fellowship at a breaking of bread (which the Passover is associated with – see Luke 22:14-20; 1Corinthians 5:6-8) is an opportunity for teaching and restoring those in error. Hezekiah clearly did not tolerate error, but freedom from error was not a prerequisite to sharing in the Passover meal.

¹⁶ Some may feel it is inappropriate to draw lessons from events that happened to national Israel and apply them to the ecclesia today. Although all the details should not be strained too far, 1Corinthians 10:1-11, as well as other passages, show it is valid to draw such lessons.

There is another lesson in the response to the preaching campaign of 30:6-9. Some rejected the message (30:10) and chose not to come to the Passover, similar to the departure from the upper room by Judas. So long as truth is resolutely taught, those who reject it will eventually separate themselves.

The correct way to respond to error is patient education, not exclusion. It may be asked, "How long should this appeal go on for?" The answer is until one of two things happens. Either the person will eventually be restored, or they will weary of the attempts to do so, and of their own volition they will "go out from us, because they were not of us" (1 John 2:19).

Wrong responses to error

A desire to maintain the purity of the truth is a commendable quality. But when this desire leads a person to seek to exclude more than just false teachers, or to separate himself from the rest of the body, it becomes damaging. Consider the following examples.

Uprooting Tares

*But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, '**No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them.***

Matthew 13:26-29

In this parable¹⁷, the tares are apparent in the ecclesia, they are not invisible. And yet the Lord's instruction is to not root them out. The reason is that the process of doing so will damage the wheat as well. The judgment of the tares is left until the return of Christ. A distinction is to be made between those who are false teachers (the devil in the parable) and the tares who are the results of the false teaching in the ecclesia. The lesson of this parable is that although we are to resist and prevent the sowing of the tare seeds (i.e. the promulgation of false teaching), when the results of that teaching are found, the correct approach is to attempt to re-educate, and not attempt to root out all who have been misled by that teaching. Such an overzealous purging in the ecclesia will do more harm than good.

The Hireling Who Abandons the Flock to Flee the Wolf

*I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, **beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is **not concerned about the sheep.*****

John 10:11-13

When confronted with a wolf (a false teacher – see Acts 20:29-31) there are 2 choices – fight or flee. Fighting the wolf to protect the flock will place a person in personal danger, but this is the correct response. Fleeing in self-preservation is selfish, and will increase the exposure of the rest of the flock to the false teaching.

¹⁷ There has long been some debate in Christadelphia regarding the application of this parable. Some expositors suggest that it refers to the apostasy in the world at large. The language and context of the parable indicate this cannot be the primary interpretation. The exhortation to the servants (who are not the same as the reaper angels) to not uproot the tares since it will result in wheat being also torn up makes no sense if it is referring to the uprooting of apostate Christianity. The language at the end of the parable ("weeping and gnashing of teeth", angels gathering, etc.) parallels other parables which are clearly about the judgement of those in the ecclesia at Christ's return (Matthew 8:11-12; 13:47-50; 22:1-13; 24:45-51; 25:14-30; 25:31-46). Much more could be said on this. The reader is referred to the chapter in George Booker's *Biblical Fellowship* which shows that there is a long history of Christadelphian writers back to brother Thomas who apply this parable to the ecclesia.

The practice of excluding sheep that are unaware of or confused by the danger of the wolves is no different to that of the hireling in John 10. The best way to help those sheep who may be threatened by false teachers is to invite them inside and provide healthy teaching which exposes false teaching for what it is. It does not help the sheep to erect a wall and keep them outside where they will be ravaged by the wolves.¹⁸

"I Alone am Left!"

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left."

And the LORD said to him, "Go, return...Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

1 Kings 19:13-18

When Elijah left Israel to make intercession against them (Romans 11:2) he expected to see God's judgments against Israel in wind, earthquake and fire. Instead, he was shown the still small voice. He was commanded to return to the faithful in Israel who needed him to strengthen the remaining remnant. Elijah had become too zealous and concerned for himself, and was writing off brothers and sisters who he regarded as not having been as faithful as he thought he was (for example he completely dismisses Obadiah whom he had met in 1 Kings 18:2-16).

Elijah's self-focussed attitude and attempted neglect of other parts of the nation in need of his help to resist the false teaching of Jezebel ought not to be imitated today.

Guilt by Association?

Members of the one body need to be focused on the needs of the rest of the body, not just their own salvation. No part of the body can leave to preserve itself. If parts of the body are in error, then all of the body shares some responsibility for this, and all should be working to correct the situation.

Some have suggested that guilt can be imputed by association with error, and that the only way to avoid this is by separation. It is true that there is a sense of guilt that comes from association, but this is a positive thing so long as attempts are made to alleviate the problem. Daniel and Ezra did not personally commit the sins of the nation of Israel, and yet they willingly associated themselves with it:

***We** have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled...**we** have not listened to **your** servants the prophets...open shame belongs to **us**...because **we** have sinned against you...**we** have rebelled against him; nor have **we** obeyed the voice of the LORD...**we** have not obeyed his voice...**we** have sinned, **we** have been wicked...because of **our** sins...for **we** are not presenting **our** supplications before you on account of any merits of our own, but on account of your great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action!*

Daniel 9:5-19

*O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to Thee, my God, for **our iniquities** have risen above our heads, and **our guilt** has grown even to the heavens.*

Ezra 9:6

The ultimate example is the Lord Jesus Christ, who bore the sins of those he came to save (Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24). This example must govern how error and sin is

¹⁸ It is a sad irony to recognize that the maintaining of walls to keep brothers and sisters who are exposed to false teaching outside has done more to ensure that false teachings have continued to exist in the ecclesia of God. The sheep most in danger from false teachings are the very ones being discouraged from access to truth by this action!

responded to in the body. The correct approach is in accepting communal responsibility, and even personal danger in trying to bind up all of the body, not separating or standing aside to avoid contamination (Luke 10:29-37).

Concern for others

There should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 12:25-27

This section started by describing two common responses to error in the body: Toleration and Separation. Both of these options can be fundamentally selfish in motivation. Toleration may come from a lack of concern for the rest of the body, not caring that some parts are sick and in need of help. Separation may betray a focus on saving one's self and avoiding contamination by the error that others may have been ensnared by.

Members of the body of Christ have responsibility to each other. Just as in marriage, responsibility does not stop at the individual (1 Corinthians 7:4). When there is error in parts of the body, the correct approach is one of seeking to heal and educate.

When a source of error is identified (i.e. a false teacher) and attempts to silence him fail, then amputation of that specific part of the body may be required. But just as with a natural body, there should be a strong reluctance to do this. If in the natural body the source of infection is a finger, amputating the arm is always going too far.

Scriptural instruction about the ecclesia limits cutting off to individuals. So long as a person is not spreading error, there is no reason to cut them off. Those who are not teachers, but have been misled by false teaching are in need of education and need the care that can be best provided in fellowship with those who can help them. There is no evidence that those who hold fast to the truth, but are members of an ecclesia with a false teacher, are to be cut off. Likewise, there is no evidence that members of ecclesias which might fellowship an ecclesia with a false teacher or honest doubters are to be cut off. If that were the case, then most of the ecclesias of the first century would have been separate from each other.

Conclusion

The first section of this document has summarized the first principle of the One Body. The implications of this doctrine are simple and compelling. If a person is regarded as being a brother or sister in Christ (i.e. they are regarded as part of the one body through the one baptism), then it is a commandment to share fellowship with them. This includes sharing the one bread. To refuse to do so is to divide Christ.

One Baptism = One Body (1 Corinthians 12:13)

One Body = One Bread (1 Corinthians 10:17)

Therefore: One Baptism = One Bread

There may be concerns that some of the Unamended brothers and sisters currently seeking fellowship with the Amended hold error, or are willing to extend fellowship with those who do. This concern is valid – error should not be tolerated. But it does not alter the command regarding fellowship in the body. Separation or delivery to Satan (disfellowship) is a tool of last resort to be used against individuals who are false teachers, not the rest of the flock. Those who have been misled or are confused by false teaching are parts of the body in especial need of help and nurture, which can be best provided within the experience of Biblical fellowship. Those who are willing to fellowship false-teachers and do not

understand the need to silence them need a diet of healthy teaching to protect them from potential wolves. The best way to do this is through biblical fellowship, not by shutting the door of the sheep fold.

There may seem to be many issues facing Ontario ecclesias in 2012 as to what is the correct response to the desire of the local Unamended ecclesias who desire fellowship. The Lord Jesus often dealt with such apparently difficult conundrums by posing a single probing question. Paraphrasing the question he once asked about the baptism of John gets to the root of the issue:

*Is the baptism of the Ontario Unamended brethren from heaven, or from men?
Answer me!*

Mark 11:29

If the answer is a definite “from heaven” or “from men”, then the next steps are obvious.

But if the answer is that of the priests, scribes and elders who said “We do not know”, it needs to be considered if such an answer is given for the same reason that they did: “They feared the people” (Mark 11:30). Courage to do what is right in the sight of God is needed to overcome the fear such action may lead to being cast out of the synagogue (John 9:22).

All ecclesias need to make a choice as to whether or not it is right in the sight of God to extend fellowship to all whom they regard as being in the body of Christ:

*But Peter and John answered and said to them, "**Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge**"*

Acts 4:19

One aspect of how all will be judged is in how they have treated the rest of the body of Christ:

*And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to **one of these brothers of mine**, even the least of them, you did it to me.'*

Matthew 25:40

Appendix A: Misapplied Passages

Some scriptural passages have been used in the past and present to justify division in the body of Christ. In a document of this length, it is not possible to look at all of them all in detail, so only a few of the more common ones are discussed below. For readers interested in a more thorough analysis of these passages, “Biblical Fellowship” by brother George Booker is highly recommended¹⁹.

When a passage appears to contradict the “one body” principle presented above, it is important to consider the following:

- 1) Look at the context.
- 2) Is the passage speaking just about false-teachers, or is it about those who have been misled or confused by false teaching?

“Neither bid him God speed” (2 John 10-11)

*If anyone comes to you and **does not bring this teaching**, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his **evil deeds**.*

2 John 10-11

This passage is used by some to defend the practice of separating from anyone with an error in belief. It is also argued that anyone who fellowships such a person is also guilty, and they should also not be fellowshiped.

This reading cannot be sustained.

These verses are speaking about those who were bringing false teaching, and were guilty of evil deeds. It is not that they simply had wrong belief, but they are actively promulgating serious error. John is talking about welcoming false teachers into the ecclesia – this fits into the section above about the stricter judgment towards teachers in the Bible. Men such as these, and Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19-20) are blasphemers who, if they won’t be silenced must be “delivered to Satan”.

The context of the previous verses reinforces this interpretation:

*For many **deceivers have gone out into the world**, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is **the deceiver and the antichrist**. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and **does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God**; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.*

2 John 7-9

The false teaching in question is one that means these teachers are not even Christian. They are described as antichrist and deceivers. John says that they “do not have God”. Today, denial that Jesus Christ came in the flesh is comparable to the teaching of the Trinity, which denies the simple truth that Jesus was truly born and had human nature. The question ought to be asked when applying 2 John 10-11 as a basis for separating from other brothers and sisters if they are truly regarded as not having God.

The sanction John commands is very severe. He does not say to simply withhold the bread and wine, but to not even give a greeting or “to bid God speed” (AV). This indicates having absolutely nothing to do with such a person. If 2 John 10-11 is to be used as justification for current fellowship divisions, then it ought to be applied as written, meaning those to whom it is applied should not be welcome to attend any ecclesial functions. John says it is wrong to even say “hello” to them!

¹⁹ See the book list at the end of this document for details on how to obtain this book online.

Note elsewhere Paul's language of "delivered unto Satan" (1 Timothy 1:20) and John's phrasing "out into the world" (1 John 4:1; 2 John 7). Paul and John do not see these teachers as having gone into a grey zone of semi-brethren that are neither in Christ or the world as some appear to regard the Unamended. Paul's "delivered unto Satan" is parallel with John's "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30, 16:11) where the prince of this world's kingdom, is outside, not inside, the "body of Christ".

Those Paul and John are referring to are now called "antichrist". They are effectively in the "devil." These brothers have been transferred back to the world. To say that a person remains part of the one baptism and one body, but is not to share the one bread is not a scriptural position. A person is either in the body and to share the bread, or out of the body, and not to share the bread.

"Withdraw yourselves" (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us...And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame.

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14

This passage is also quoted to support the practice of removing from fellowship all who "walk disorderly" or believe false doctrine and those who will not withdraw from them.

Again, a consideration of the context demonstrates this is not Paul's intent.

The context is not even about false-teachers. It is about those who were freeloading off of the ecclesia's generosity and choosing to not work for a living. After Paul presents himself as an example of supporting himself (v8-9) he goes on to say:

*For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: "if anyone will not work, neither let him eat". For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, **doing no work at all**, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to **work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread**.*

2 Thessalonians 3:11-12

This is the "tradition" Paul is speaking about in v6 and 14. The problem was that some were living an "undisciplined life, doing no work at all".

The sanction that Paul commands in this situation is to keep aloof or not associate. This does not mean to cut off or disfellowship²⁰, but to not enable or participate in his lazy lifestyle. This is made clear by v15:

*And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but **admonish him as a brother**.*

2 Thessalonians 3:15

In contrast to the false teacher of 2 John, this man is not to be treated as an enemy. He is to be admonished as a brother.

²⁰ It is unlikely anyone would suggest that those who are not prepared to work for a living must be disfellowshipped. If not, then it is inappropriate to appeal to these verses to justify disfellowship for other circumstances.

“That ye all speak the same thing” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1 Corinthians 1:10

This verse is used by some to claim that being of one mind is a prerequisite for fellowship to occur. Acts 2:42-46 is also used to make this point:

And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.

Acts 2:42-46

Acts' record of the early days of the ecclesia is a truly remarkable account of oneness of mind and purpose. These chapters present a cameo of the kingdom. But it did not last long. Soon there was greed, deceit and jealousy (Acts 5:1-10). The initial disagreement regarding the welfare of the Hebrew and Hellenised Jewish widows (Acts 6:1) was to soon expand into the hostility towards those preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-3) and the divisive false gospel that circumcision and law keeping was required for salvation (Acts 15:1-2) that nearly divided the ecclesia (Galatians 2:11-14). Despite the letter that came from the conference of Acts 15, this problem, as well as others continued to prevent a unity of mind for the rest of the first century.²¹

Despite this lack of one-mindedness on matters of doctrine, there is never an indication in the New Testament that the believers should not fellowship together.

This is most clear in the context of 1 Corinthians which has been discussed earlier in this article.

The “same mind” of 1 Corinthians 1:10 is an ideal. It is the goal of fellowship, not the pre-requisite. In 1 Corinthians 10:17 it is stated that the one bread teaches that the body is to be one. It follows that the breaking of bread is to occur among brothers and sisters, even when they are not of one mind, as the sharing of the one loaf is imploring them to be of one, just as the Lord did on the night before his crucifixion.

If being of one mind was required before fellowship could occur, then there would have been no breaking of bread and fellowship occurring in most ecclesias in the first century.

In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul speaks not only of the one body and one baptism, but also of the one hope and one faith. What is the relationship between these? Is it a requirement to first have a perfect understanding and agreement in an ecclesia on the one faith before they can act as one body in fellowship?

As Paul continues to speak of the body in this chapter, he answers these questions:

²¹ Some have argued on the basis of Genesis 13:8-9 that when there is dispute among brothers, it is better to divide than continue to have strife. The disastrous results for the ecclesia in Lot's care should demonstrate the folly of this advice. There may be peace in such a separation, but it is a false peace, unable to bring unity of mind to the entire body. In the first century it might have seemed to be much simpler for the Jewish and Gentile believers to go their separate ways to avoid the challenges that were faced in Galatians 2:1-14 and Acts 15:1-2. But this would have been the opposite of one of the purposes of Jesus' death, to break down the middle wall of partition (Ephesians 2:11-17) and unite all his followers in one flock (John 10:16-17). Today, separating to an ecclesia that is filled with those of similar mind is not a fulfillment of the command to be of one mind. It is a parody of the one body. As Paul says, “if the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? (1Corinthians 12:17) True unity is developed when the ecclesia is filled with the diverse range of body parts that “God has placed” (1Corinthians 12:18), and in that situation learning to work and grow together.

*And he gave²² some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to **the building up of the body** of Christ; **until we all attain to the unity of the faith**, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **to a mature man**, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up in all aspects into him**, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, **causes the growth of the body** for the building up of itself in love.*

Ephesians 4:11-16

Note the language of growth. Unity of faith is the destination of a lifetime in Christ. Both individuals and ecclesias are expected to continue to grow in knowledge, with perfection only attained when Christ returns.

It is sometimes said that New Testament examples of patient education to rectify error in ecclesias are no longer relevant because those ecclesias were young and in transition, but today, ecclesias are mature and established. Given that ecclesias ought to be lampstands that are growing and have an influx of new members (either from preaching or the Sunday School) there should always be an aspect of ecclesias that corresponds to the growth described in Ephesians 4. It is always a dangerous argument to disregard scriptural instruction regarding the ecclesia on the grounds that it is no longer relevant today.

Utterly Destroy the Idolatrous City (Deuteronomy 13:12-16)

If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to live in, anyone saying that some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom you have not known), then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. And if it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword. Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God; and it shall be a ruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt."

Deuteronomy 13:12-16

The above passage has been cited to justify dividing from other ecclesias who may have members who believe error (even if those ecclesias are not teaching the false doctrine), or are simply willing to fellowship other ecclesias that may have error. The logic is given that Matthew 18:15-17 which is specifically about matters of offence between individual brethren has similarities to Deuteronomy 13 and can therefore be applied to corporate inter-ecclesial relationships.

There are several reasons why these conclusions are not valid:

- 1) Matthew 18:16 is a clear citation of Deuteronomy 19:15. The context of Matthew 18 and Deuteronomy 19 are similar – both passages give instruction in how to manage matters of dispute between individuals, and offer checks and balances to ensure that arbitrary accusations of sin against others are thoroughly investigated. In Deuteronomy 19, false accusers were to be severely punished. Deuteronomy 19:

²² The specific context of this section is about the purpose of the Holy Spirit gifts until the scriptures were complete, but the purpose of both the gifts, and Bible is the same – to help the body to grow.

There are echoes in the language of Deuteronomy 19:15-21 and Deuteronomy 17:2-7, but it should be noted that the subject matter appears to be different. Chapter 19 is more about lawsuits, while chapter 17 is dealing with the issue of worshipping other gods. Chapter 17 then links to Deuteronomy 13:6-18 which is also about idolatry. To go from Matthew 18 to Deuteronomy 13 involves a change of context, and two other passages. To imply that Matthew 18 is about dealing with apostate ecclesias is tenuous at best, especially when there is no example in the New Testament that that the lessons of Matthew 18 were to be applied between ecclesias.

- 2) It is not clear that that the common assumption that Matthew 18:15-17 is applicable to doctrinal matters is correct.²³ The entire context of Matthew 18 is about matters of personal offence and how best to resolve them. The most desirable option is to forgive seventy times seven.
- 3) The language of Deuteronomy 13 is about utter annihilation and judgment. The language of disfellowship in the New Testament has restoration as a primary motive (1Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20). Therefore it is an invalid to say that Deuteronomy 13 is about disfellowshipping ecclesias given that the New Testament never talks about such an act, and the purpose of Deuteronomy 13 is not disfellowship but annihilation.
- 4) Even if Deuteronomy 13 is to be applicable today, the passage is about rejecting God and becoming an idolater. This is not analogous to the differences that separate various ecclesias today in Ontario. To equate the two is to stretch Biblical interpretation much too far!
- 5) It is useful to consider how Deuteronomy 13 is applied throughout the rest of the Old Testament:
 - a. Joshua 22 – The chapter starts with a suspicion of idolatry by the tribes on the east bank of the Jordan. Investigation of the matter reveals that this is not the case and reconciliation results. Those who have investigated the Unamended ecclesias currently seeking fellowship with the Amended have also discovered that they are not fallen away into rejection of God and apostasy.
 - b. Judges 19-21 – There are some similarities to the law of Deuteronomy 13 and the events of these 3 chapters, but in a very negative way. There is no indication that the near fratricide of Benjamin was an outcome that had the blessing of God. The incident is an example of how NOT to deal with matters of dispute between ecclesias. Because Benjamin would not deal with a single city, the decision was made to attack all of Benjamin, similar to the daisy chain concept of fellowship some hold today that requires cutting off not only an offending ecclesia, but other ecclesias that will not do likewise. The account ends with mourning that one tribe was “cut off” from Israel (Judges 21:2-6)
 - c. It’s never applied again! What is most instructive about Deuteronomy 13 is not how it is applied, but how it was not applied. Countless occasions exist in Israel’s history where the nation slid into the apostasy of idolatry, and certain cities were especially known for their idolatry (e.g. the calves in Bethel and Dan), and yet God never commands the righteous to apply this law. By contrast, God shows incredible patience, rising early to send prophets to appeal his people to repent for generation after generation (Jeremiah 7:25). He expresses a reluctance to apply the full force of his justice on the people (Jeremiah 31:20; Hosea 11:8-9). Surely this is the example God’s wants his children to follow.

Care needs to be taken when appealing to some Old Testament passages for guidance to ensure that the right lessons are drawn. One example of this is in 1 Kings 22, the misguided attempt by Jehoshaphat to bring unity to the nation by making an alliance with Ahab. General principles can be drawn related to not ignoring the activities of false teachers. But it must be remembered that there is a huge difference between a man like Ahab, who worshipped Baal, hated Yahweh, forced God’s people into immorality and butchered his prophets and those who are communally regarded as brothers and sisters in Christ, sharing the same baptism and hope of the kingdom. The main lessons from 1 Kings 22 would be much more applicable if there was an attempt by some to find unity with the Roman Catholic Church.

²³ 1 Timothy 5:19-20 (which does have closer ties to Deuteronomy 17) is probably more relevant, but this passage is specifically about individual elders who sin, not about the rest of the flock. This is consistent with the section of this article on “Dealing with Error in the Body”.

Appendix B: Questions and Answers

Is it right to assess if someone is in the body of Christ and validly baptized?

Yes. It is imperative that this is done.

It is sometimes said that since it is wrong to judge, and therefore it is inappropriate to speculate whether an Unamended person is a brother or sister in Christ or not.

It is true that the final judgment is the role of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore it would be a serious error to speculate whether another individual will be in the kingdom or not. But in order to obey even the most basic of the commandments of Christ, it is necessary to assess whether or not another person should be regarded as part of the one body. Even addressing another person as brother or sister is making that judgment. If it is wrong to do this with the Unamended, then it is wrong to do it with anyone, including the members of one's own ecclesia.

Simple commandments such as:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.

Mark 16:15-16

and

*And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God **should love his brother** also.*

1 John 4:21

are impossible to obey if it is incorrect to form an opinion regarding who is a brother and who is in the world. Right from the beginning of the Bible, responsibility to one's brother is vital (Genesis 4:9). This necessitates first knowing who is to be regarded as a brother.

When Paul discusses the bread and cup in 1 Corinthians 11:29, he says it is necessary to discern the body. The context of this verse indicates it is referring to the body of Christ, or the ecclesia.

People cannot be "almost in the body" – there are no grey areas – everyone on the planet is either in Christ, or, is in the world.

Every person you encounter is in need of one of two things: Bread or Water.²⁴

Does Central regard the Unamended²⁵ part of the "One Body"?

All evidence points to the answer "yes". Consider:

- Hundreds of Unamended have become members of Amended ecclesias over the past decades. "Rebaptism"²⁶ is almost unheard of. In other words, they are clearly regarded by the Amended community as having been already baptized in to Christ.
- Unamended are nearly universally referred to as "brother" or "sister".
- When an Unamended brother or sister joins an Amended ecclesia, an interview occurs, but the focus is on what they currently believe, not what they believed when they were baptized.
- When marriages occur between an Amended and Unamended brother and sister, the marriage is not regarded as being "marriage to an alien".

²⁴ In other words everyone needs either to hear the gospel and be called on to submit to the water of baptism, or they need to be treated as part of the one body, including the sharing fellowship and the one bread.

²⁵ In the context of this article, "Unamended" particularly refers to those Unamended currently seeking to share fellowship with Amended ecclesias, not those who have rejected the UA08 and do not wish to extend fellowship with the Amended or any Unamended who accept the UA08.

²⁶ "Rebaptism" is not a real word. A person is baptised into Christ only once. A better term is re-immense.

None of these points are true of people in other churches, such as the Baptists or Jehovah's Witnesses, who are communally regarded as being in the world, and requiring belief and baptism before they are welcome to enjoy fellowship.

If any were to say that they do not regard the Unamended as part of the One Body, there are serious doctrinal repercussions. It is a fundamental first principle that baptism is a prerequisite to being in the One Body. To say that the Unamended are not to be regarded as being in the One Body, but that if they accept a particular doctrinal statement (i.e. "join Central") is in effect to deny that baptism is essential. A logical consequence of a belief that the Unamended are not part of the One Body is that one must also insist they be baptised before they can be considered brothers and sisters (Acts 19:1-7).

Does the UA08 contradict Amended teaching?

Opinion on this question varies. This is a large subject and a full consideration would vastly increase the length of this document – therefore this document is only considering the issue of fellowship practice. But since this question is rightly on the mind of many, the following points are worth considering when answering:

- Some claim that the UA08 contradicts Amended teaching on resurrectional responsibility. The UA08's inclusion of language from the Robert Roberts' article *True Principles and Uncertain Details* should show that concern to be unfounded.
- Some claim that the teachings of the UA08 contradict Amended teaching on the atonement. But there are others in the Amended community that see the UA08 as falling within the spectrum of views that have historically existed, and continue to exist on the atonement. The very fact that many in Amended ecclesias believe this demonstrates the claim to be true. (If the claim were not true, then no Amended would hold it!)
- Outside Ontario some Unamended ecclesias have robustly rejected the UA08²⁷. Some of these ecclesias are no longer willing to fellowship with Unamended ecclesias who agree with the UA08. In recent years the Unamended Advocate magazine editorship has moved to the USA and is taking a more forceful Andrewist publishing policy. In addition, it is reported that the magazine is no longer publishing ecclesial news or announcements for UA08 Unamended ecclesias.²⁸ These facts ought to lay to rest concerns that the UA08 allows for the false teachings to creep in unawares. It cannot be over-emphasised how important this point is.
- For many Amended the UA08 is not the real issue, fellowship association is the main concern. This can be seen in that some Unamended ecclesias have already had 'amended' statements of faith (the Chicago ecclesia for example) but they continue to be unwelcome. This is even more evident since 2008 following the formal adoption of BASF²⁹ by the main CGAF meetings in Ohio and Florida. Despite this, some local Amended meetings continue to have issues regarding fellowship with CGAF because of their fellowship practice which includes welcoming of unity-minded Unamended. This unfortunately demonstrates that for some in the Amended community, the question of the correctness of the UA08 is a "red herring" since even when a group simply adopts the BASF, some in the Amended are still not willing to extend fellowship.

²⁷ See <http://www.republic-christadelphians.org/NASUstatements.html> for a selection of letters rejecting the NASU making this very clear. Also a special issue of the Advocate magazine in 2006 was written to reject the NASU (see <http://www.christadelphian-advocate.org/issues/2006/03/>.)

²⁸ This is just some of the evidence of the polarisation that is currently ongoing within the Unamended community. Ecclesias are coalescing into 2 groups, one that rejects anything to do with Amended Christadelphians, and the other that seeking unity and fellowship with the rest of the worldwide body of Christ.

²⁹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Blessed_Hope, <http://www.abrahamicafaithinniles.org/belief.php> and <http://cotbh.org/belief.php>

How do Central³⁰ ecclesias elsewhere deal with false teachers?

When false teachers (against the first principles expressed in the BASF) are deemed to arise elsewhere in the worldwide community, the response taken is that expressed earlier in this article. Even locally in Ontario, on issues not related to BASF clause 24 this approach is taken. Without getting into details of specific cases, the usual response includes:

- Charging the false-teacher to cease teaching error (1 Timothy 1:3).
- If he does not stop, removing him from all teaching responsibilities (Titus 1:11 – “silenced” literally means to “gag the mouth”).
- If he persists depending on the severity of the case it sometimes necessitates delivering the individual to Satan (i.e. disfellowship) (1 Timothy 1:18-20).
- Meanwhile, ecclesias intensify efforts to ensure their members receive sound teaching on the issue in question. There is a real danger in false teaching, but scripture reveals that light will triumph over darkness. The truth is simple, and error is usually complicated and confusing. There should be a confidence that a policy of teaching right doctrine is the most important aspect in mitigating the harm of false teaching.
- When false teachers arise in other ecclesias, efforts are made to persuade the other ecclesia to handle the false teacher in the same way.
- If these efforts fail, then the ecclesia that is allowing the false teacher to be active will be increasingly marginalized. This is done by notifying all the regional ecclesias of the concern, reducing or suspending the exchange of teachers between the ecclesia with the false teacher and ensuring all regional ecclesias continue to receive sound teaching. (As per the case of Philetus who after Hymenaeus is disfellowshipped by Paul in 1 Timothy then joins with him in 2 Timothy 2:17-18).
- Occasionally an ecclesia may decide to formally suspend fellowship with another ecclesia because they believe the ecclesia has set itself out by design to preach and propagate at large false doctrine. When this is done, it is an autonomous decision of individual ecclesias. It should be noted that this is not a common occurrence, and it has no New Testament precedent.
- If other local ecclesias do not reach a similar conclusion and continue in fellowship with the offending ecclesia, so long as these ecclesias are not also propagating false doctrine, they usually remain in fellowship with the ecclesia that severed fellowship with the offending one.

This last point is very relevant to the current situation in Ontario. Throughout the rest of the ecclesial world, ecclesias do at times come to different conclusions as to whether another ecclesia should be fellowshiped. The most common occurrence of this is on matters related to divorce and remarriage, or where some ecclesias have added new “Doctrines to be Rejected” to their statement of faith. But it also occurs on matters related to the BASF. When two ecclesias form different opinions regarding a third ecclesia’s conformity with the BASF, this does not lead to those two ecclesias also suspending fellowship from each other.³¹ In this way a local “tear” in the body does not spread into a world-wide rending of the body.

A concern may exist that ecclesias adopting the conclusions of this document would find themselves out of fellowship with Amended ecclesias across the rest of the world. The points above should show that so long as an ecclesia is not itself propagating false teaching, this is not the case.

³⁰ The terms “Central” and “Amended” are used somewhat interchangeably in this section. Both refer to the same groups in the body. In North America “Amended” is generally used as a distinction from “Unamended”. In the rest of the world, “Central” is used because there exist other factions in the body (such as the Dawn, Berean, Old Paths etc.) who also use the BASF (making them amended) but are unwilling to fellowship with the vast majority of Christadelphians.

³¹ This fact is the main point of distinction between Central’s fellowship practice and other Christadelphian groups such as the Dawn and Berean. Those groups insist on separation to unlimited degrees from ecclesias with error. In Central, the separation rarely exceeds one degree of separation. It is for this reason that the Dawn and Berean will not fellowship with any Central Christadelphians, even if they personally agree 100% on doctrine and practice.

Are the Unamended currently welcome to fellowship at other ecclesias worldwide?

The answer to this varies.

There are some ecclesias who would not welcome Unamended visitors.

It is sometimes claimed that some do welcome them, but in ignorance of the issues that led to the separation of the Amended and Unamended communities.³²

There are also ecclesias fully aware of the situation in North America who have publicly stated they are willing to extend fellowship to Unamended visitors and they do so. In some cases the ecclesia may ask the visitor if they personally agree with the BASF, in other cases even this is not a prerequisite. Further evidence of this can be provided.

As shown above, ecclesias within the Amended community autonomously decide their fellowship practice in matters like this.

The exact number of ecclesias adopting each practice is probably unknown, but ecclesias willing to fellowship Unamended visitors are not an exception.

Outside of North America, ecclesias who share the table with Unamended visitors in an open and informed manner are not cut off by their local ecclesias. This fact should alleviate the fears some may have that extending fellowship to local unamended ecclesias will result in being cut off from the rest of the worldwide Christadelphian community.

Isn't this "conscience-based" fellowship?

No.

This document is not proposing conscience-based fellowship, where individual brothers and sisters choose who they will or will not fellowship.³³

The New Testament is very clear in its teaching that individuals are to submit to the will of their ecclesia and not act in a "rogue" manner. The model of fellowship contained in this document is ecclesially based. The members of individual ecclesias should make decisions together regarding who they will fellowship³⁴.

³² This claim may be an assumption on the part of some Amended in North America which does not recognize good faith on the part of Unamended travellers. The testimony of several brethren with experience of door-keeping in London, Birmingham and Sydney suggests that the opposite is the case: Central doorkeepers, at least in the most-visited cities, were often well aware of the fellowship issue in North America, in no small part because of every new Unamended visitor feeling obliged to pre-emptively tell the doorkeeper the entire history when asked for names for the visitor's book. The ecclesia would in general still record the name, announce welcome from the platform, still break bread. Against this it was noted that the Unamended visitor having raised the shadow of controversy might discourage some UK or Australian presiding brothers from inviting the visitor to read or give a prayer.

³³ Conscience-based fellowship works both ways. It is not only about an individual choosing to fellowship someone contrary to the wishes of his or her ecclesia. It is also an individual choosing to NOT fellowship according to the manner of their ecclesia. The practice of some to "pass the emblems by" on a Sunday morning is also conscience-based fellowship, and is not warranted by scripture.

Imagine what the reaction of the Lord Jesus would have been if one of the twelve had refused to take the bread and wine in the upper room on the grounds that Judas was there!

³⁴ Within this framework of ecclesially based fellowship, note that in some cases an ecclesially based decision may mean that some ecclesias do take an informal or formal position that they will set different 'inbound' and 'outbound' requirements for the ecclesia. For example an ecclesia may close its doors to divorced and remarried members, even as visitors in good standing in other ecclesias, but not impose an 'outward' fellowship restriction that prevents members attending a Bible school where divorced and remarried will be present. While not an ideal solution from a New Testament "one body = one baptism = one bread" perspective, it does happen. Setting 'inbound' and 'outbound' practice at different levels typically occurs informally as a pragmatic concession by ecclesias where some members

The opposite extreme of “conscience-based” fellowship is “bloc-based” fellowship, where groups of ecclesias band together and make it a condition of fellowship that all ecclesias in the bloc or group have identical fellowship practice. This is the model of fellowship followed by the Dawn and Berean groups, and is without mandate in scripture. The Dawn and Berean frequently describe the Central model as “ecclesial autonomy,” which technically it is, being comparable to the original Greek city-state use of the term “autonomy,” By the same token the Dawn and Berean model can be called “ecclesial heteronomy” where all must do the exact same thing. The Berean model is also vehemently rejected by the Ecclesial Guide when discussing Fraternal Gatherings:

“These are beneficial when restricted to purely spiritual objects (i.e., let the brethren assemble anywhere from anywhere, and exhort, or worship, or have social intercourse together); but they become sources of evil if allowed to acquire a legislative character in the least degree. Ecclesial independence should be guarded with great jealousy with the qualifications indicated in the foregoing sections. To form “unions” or “societies” of ecclesias, in which delegates should frame laws for the individual ecclesias, would be to lay the foundation of a collective despotism which would interfere with the free growth and the true objects of ecclesial life. Such collective machineries create fictitious importances, which tend to suffocate the truth. All ecclesiastical history illustrates this.”

simply cannot cope with ‘inbound’ fellowship, but where ecclesia feels it would be wrong to restrict ‘outbound’ fellowship of members.

Appendix C: Further Reading

A short paper such as this cannot be a complete study of all the issues related to fellowship practice. For a more detailed consideration of this subject, the following Christadelphian works are highly recommended for further reading.

Brother Collyer's and Roberts' articles were written at a time when division was occurring in the brotherhood. Brother George Booker goes into a lot of detail regarding "wrested" passages on the subject of fellowship. Brother Andrew Perry's book is more technical than the others, but is well worth reading, especially for his consideration for the various steps of response in confronting false teaching.

- Islip Collyer** "The Principles Governing Fellowship"
Principles and Proverbs
"The Scriptural Principles Governing Controversy"
Principles and Proverbs
"A Pure Fellowship",
The Christadelphian, Vol. 68 (Sept. 1931)
An Appeal to Christadelphians - Booklet
- Robert Roberts** "True Principles and Uncertain Details - The Danger of Going Too Far in our Demands on Fellow-Believers"
The Christadelphian, Vol. 35 (May 1898)
- George Booker** Biblical Fellowship
http://christadelphianbooks.org/booker/bible_fellowship/index.html
What Are the First Principles?
http://www.christadelphianbooks.org/booker/what_are_1st_princ/index.html
- Andrew Perry** Fellowship Matters
<http://www.lulu.com/content/paperback-book/fellowship-matters/536192>
- H. A. Whittaker** Block Disfellowship: Is It Taught in the Bible?
The Testimony, Vol. 43 (Aug. & Sept. 1973)
<http://cbmresources.org/forums/index.php?/topic/243-block-disfellowship-is-it-taught-in-the-bible>