



Conducted by
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“WOULD you please comment on the question, ‘Who is my brother in Christ?’ Would you please deal with it under the headings of Repentance, Baptism, The Church, Practices and Fellowship?”

THIS is not an easy question to answer. We are living almost two thousand years since the gospel first began to be preached, and during that time we know that the message of Christ has been perverted in many ways, but I feel sure that if we refer ourselves to the early days of christianity, and argue our case from first principles, then we shall undoubtedly learn something useful. All I ask is that the questioner, and anyone who reads what I have to say, will keep an open mind and an unbiased view. Let us begin, then as the questioner suggests.

Repentance

It is undeniably true that before we can be brethren in Christ then we must have travelled the way of repentance. The greek word in the N.T. is METANOIA and literally means ‘after-thought, change of mind’, and the word is always used of repentance from sin or evil. Therefore we are

thinking primarily of a person who looks back over his sinful life, is sorry for the state in which he finds himself, and decides to change his mind and turn to God. Consequently, we can understand why the first call of both John the Baptist and Peter was to repentance. My brother in Christ will be one who has repented of his sinful state and turned in obedience to God for forgiveness and cleansing, otherwise he would not be my brother in Christ. In this sense, repentance cannot be a continuing process.

However, Luke records how repentance should be viewed within the brotherhood, "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" Luke 17:3,4. Trespass here has the meaning of a false step, a blunder, a deviation from righteousness.

Obviously, if I can forgive my brother his trespasses then we are not speaking about that kind of sin and evil which only God can forgive. If I have been wrong, then of course I can have a repentant attitude, and I ought to have, and my brother ought to forgive me. Let us never forget that everyone of us can be found in a fault and we may all have occasion to repent. We spend too much time looking outward and not enough inward. It seems to me that the word of God is used like a bludgeon to beat our brethren with rather than the healing balm which it can be. Yes, my brother in Christ will know repentance and he will practice it.

Baptism

My brother in Christ will certainly be one who has been baptised, that is immersed in water for the remission of sins. If he hadn't, then he would not be my brother in Christ, because it is when we are obedient to God's call that we become 'in Christ'. Paul says, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death" Rom. 6:3.

In some way that I don't understand, my brethren and I are related to and united with deity; Jesus prayed to his Father, "That they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" John 17:21.

Some argue that it is logical to think that if Mormons, Jehovahs Witnesses, and others have been immersed in water for the remission of sins then they are my brothers in Christ, but erring brethren. I do not deny that such may have ostensibly been immersed in water, but how can they be my brothers in Christ when they are openly trying to subvert the very Christ in whom they are supposed to be? No, I personally will not have it, nor will I ever in my wildest imaginations equate my brothers in Christ who may have erred in some respect with those who openly subvert Christ and his teaching. I am not aware of any of my brethren in Churches of Christ who are openly denying the Lord who saved them because they prefer to promote a system of their own.

The Church

My brother in Christ would be a member of the Church of Christ. I know of no other church to which he could belong because Jesus said "I will build my church". Baptism brings us into the body of Christ; the body of Christ is the Church, so there is a complete integration of baptism and the church.

I wrote in the October /75 issue of the "S.S." "There is only one Church mentioned in the N.T. and that is the Church that Jesus initiated and which came into being in the 1st century A.D. This means that there must be a big question mark against the many denominations which have sprung from that church which started at Pentecost". I believed that then and I believe it now.

I am convinced that my brother in Christ would want to be associated with the church that bears the name of the one who loved it and gave Himself for it. I think that if we stated positively where our brethren should be found we would not be so actively engaged in speculating where they might be found.

Practice

My brother in Christ would certainly be very careful of the practices in which he engaged himself. This is not to say, of course, the practices of my brethren would be absolutely identical

In every respect. I may believe that some of the practices in which some of my brethren engage themselves may be right or wrong as the case may be, but because I believe them to be right or wrong doesn't necessarily make them right or wrong; things are right or wrong whether or not I believe them to be so.

For my sins I found myself a protagonist in the last war. The army strategists taught me that it was unwise to take up a position from which I could not retreat if the ground on which I was standing became untenable. Now don't misunderstand me here; I am not saying that I would not stand and stand firmly if the occasion demanded it, but what I am saying is that it is easy to take up a posture and announce beliefs which I hold to be irreversible and denounce everyone who does not believe exactly as I do. Now theoretically I and every brother in Christ has the right to do this if we so desire. What do we then arrive at? Do we form churches or communities of one because we can't agree with each other?

Yes, my brother in Christ will be careful of what he practices, but he will have sufficient intelligence to know that because a thing is done differently it does not necessarily mean that it is done wrongly, or that it is evil in intent.

I am well aware that some of my brethren practice things which perhaps I personally would not, but I am not prepared to denounce them as charlatans because of that, And if their declared intention is to promote the gospel of Christ then I will co-operate with all to achieve that laudable objective.

In the final analysis, let God be the judge of what is right or wrong. He is much more capable than we are.

Conclusion

I think Fellowship is too important a subject to deal with quietly and lightly, and if the questioner will permit then I will return to this in the next issue.