

Dear brother Fred:

Loving Greetings

Jan 26, 1974

I have gotten a few thoughts together in answer to your Sept 13th letter. I would like much more time to present them better and to answer more thoroughly but I feel it best to get it off to you in its present form and extent, as we must be getting on with the Berean. We have not yet an opportunity to start on the January issue. We would very much like someday to catch up and be current with the publication, and we never shall if we do not at least try not to get further behind. We mailed the negatives for November and December issues to bro Don in Houston two weeks ago, and thought they were well along in being printed, but he called me last night and said they had never arrived -- apparently they had been lost in the mail so we shall have to do them over.

In reply to your Sept 13 letter, let me first express what I believe to be your position as expressed therein, so that we may know the points at issue, and you may correct me if I misunderstand. Your belief is (as I understand it) --

1. Jesus made no law concerning divorce and remarriage.
2. The "Edenic law" from the beginning was one man, one woman for life. This has never changed except as relaxed temporarily by God through Moses because of "hardness of heart".
3. No divorce is permissible for any reason in this present dispensation.
4. Even if there has been divorce, no second marriage is permissible in the present dispensation while the first partner lives.
5. Christ was not making a new law in Matt 5: 32 and 19:9 but simply reaffirming the Edenic law.
6. Christ's exceptions in Matt 5:32 and 19:9 simply say that if the woman is already an adulteress, the man is not causing her to be one by putting her away. The exceptions have no other significance or value.
7. YOUR MAIN POINT: The adultery of the second union continues as adultery as long as the union is continued, and no such couple can ever be received back into fellowship (while the former partner lives) unless they separate and completely cease to be man and wife.

* * *

Now against this I would like to place the teachings of bre Thomas and Roberts, and then to point out why (wherein they differ from your views) I prefer as more

reasonable and scriptural their understanding and interpretation of these passages in question.

From the numbered quotations on pages 2 & 3 of my article of July 1971, the following points of bro Roberts' consistent convictions on this matter are made irrefutably clear (and in all that anyone has ever produced from bro Thomas on the matter, he was in full agreement with bro Roberts): –

1. “Divorce is inadmissible according to the law of Christ, except in the case as mentioned in Matthew 19:9. Where this case arises and the parties are divorced, they are at liberty to marry again. Objection may be well meant, but it is without ground.” (quotation #4).
2. “There is nothing in human law or divine to prevent a man marrying again, from whom his wife has been divorced for unfaithfulness” (Q #5)
3. “Marriage with the divorced woman (he is speaking of divorce for proper cause, as he explains in Q #10) cannot be put in the category of adultery” (Q #9)
4. “Christ recognizes no divorce as lawful (save for the cause of fornication). This severs the bond” (Q. #10)
5. “There seems nothing difficult about Matt 5:31-32. The words of Christ amount to this, that his law recognizes no cause of separation between husband and wife except conjugal infidelity. . . By the law of Christ, the wife put away from any cause saving for the cause of fornication is the man’s wife still and anyone marrying her is guilty of adultery. He does not mean that if divorced, proper cause, a woman may not marry again. His words must be taken in their connection”. (Q. #11)
6. Suing at law for divorce is “highly unscriptural,” an ‘infraction of divine law’, ‘a sin’, etc. (Q. #12)

(you will note in passing that bro Roberts repeatedly uses such expressions as ‘the law of Christ’, ‘his law’, etc. He clearly didn’t believe Christ made a new law in this matter).

Now bre Thomas and Roberts based their convictions on exactly the same passages (Matt 5:32 and 19:9), as you base yours, yet they saw something very different in these passages than you do, and in the same aspects of the matter they are directly

opposed to your conclusions. Have you considered that it is possible they were right and you wrong?

For the time, bro Fred, this matter troubled me like it is troubling you, and at one time I fervently wished that these brethren had not written these things, just as you wish now. But as in so many other aspects of the Truth, I have found myself forced by further study and experience closer and closer to the views of our providentially raised-up pioneer brethren.

The whole issue between you and bre Thomas and Roberts hinges in the matter of just what the exceptive phrases mean, and whether they really have any substantive meaning in Christ's law, or are just a passing reference to a minor aspect.

You say they just mean that if the woman has already committed fornication, the man does not cause her to commit adultery by putting her away because she already has committed adultery and is an adulteress. This would make it rather a purposeless statement on Christ's part – really too obvious to need stating at all.

Bre Thomas and Roberts believed that the exceptive phrases express a truly meaningful and important part of the law – an exception to the general law otherwise defined. They believed that Christ gave a new and necessary law for an entirely new condition on the earth – a condition when for the first time the people of God were not under the sentence of death for adultery.

Adultery cannot be ignored or tolerated. It must be dealt with. If not dealt with, it will completely destroy the institution of marriage, as we see in the world around us today, where marriage has become practically meaningless in any true sense.

I believe you would get a more scripturally balanced picture if you could transfer your emphasis to the destructive, corruptive wickedness and abomination of the sin of adultery, rather than the "sin" of divorce as the solution of the problem of adultery. There is no holiness or benefit in pretending a marriage still exists that has been destroyed by adultery. (Lest this be misunderstood, I repeat that adultery does not destroy a marriage automatically. It can, if repented of and abandoned, be forgiven, if it has not gone to the point of remarriage).

Now, on the face of it, the teaching of bre Thomas and Roberts on the exceptive clauses is (to me) a much more logical and reasonable one than yours. Their

understanding of it gives the clauses real meaning and purpose as a necessary and inseparable part of the new law being given, while your understanding treats the exceptions as sort of a minor side issue – the passing explanation of a lesser aspect that could be left out without affecting the meaning: that really doesn't need to be there at all, but just expresses something that would be obvious anyway.

In fact, you quote these passages with the exceptions completely deleted, and to you this form is their true meaning.

The understanding of bre Thomas and Roberts is to me the clear meaning of the passages. Bro Roberts actually says, “there seems nothing difficult about Matt 5:32”. To him there could be no doubt as to its meaning, and to his quicker perception and very deep comprehension of the spirit of the Truth as exhibited in his voluminous writings, it is easy to see how this could be.

I believe their understanding is the obvious and natural one: your suggested meaning had to be read in, and it is an obvious attempt to explain away what is on the face of it, the clear and natural meaning. (Please do not misunderstand or be offended at the expression “explain away”. I believe the motive is perfectly sincere and honest. You sincerely feel in justice to Christ, it has to be so explained away. I felt that way at one time, and I believe I was sincere).

Now, I can see that your suggested meaning is a possible (though not probable) explanation of the exceptive clause in Matt 5:32. But I cannot see how you can possibly apply this interpretation to Matt 19:9) –

“Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, shall commit adultery.”

How can you fit this with your interpretation that Christ is just saying that as the woman tions already an adulterous, she is not being made one? By your interpretation, what does “except for fornication” have to do with whether or not he commits adultery by remarrying?

The exceptive clause here is utterly meaningless and incomprehensible if it is not clearly saying that if a man puts away his wife for fornication, and marries another, he does not commit adultery. This is how bre Thomas and Roberts saw it, and this is how I see it, and can see no other meaning.

When I was struggling with these passages years ago, I felt I must get rid of Matt 19:9 altogether to escape this meaning, and I sincerely tried to get rid of it by searching “authorities” and “versions”. But study and experience has convinced me that this passage is genuine, and must be fairly faced and accepted as bre Thomas and Roberts accepted it.

You ask, “If the second marriages adultery, when and how does it cease to be adultery and become an acceptable marriage?”

This is a fair and reasonable question. I would offer the following points of consideration –

To marry a woman put away for any cause except adultery is itself adultery.

Being adultery, the second marriage terminates the first marriage. It does not do this legally – that is, righteously. It does it wickedly. It is a sin. Until Christ’s new law, it was a sin punishable by death (and still is, eventually, if not repented of: but the punishment is not to be by man). It is a dreadful sin. The Scriptures always present adultery as at least as bad as, if not worse than, murder.

According to Christ’s law in Matt 5:32 and 19:9 as bre Thomas and Roberts (and I) sincerely believe it to be, the terrible sin of adultery terminates the first marriage. It does not, as I have mentioned, always terminate it automatically. A man can forgive his wife if she forsakes her sin (as Bro Roberts points out - see quotation #8 in my letter, page 2), if she has not gone ahead and closed the door by marrying someone else. An adulterous second marriage terminates the first marriage.

In some things, the clock cannot be turned back. Once done, the things are done, however sinful, and they have created a new condition that must be faced.

It may be argued that the second marriage should be canceled, and that the wife should go back to her first husband, but Bro Dowling pointed out (correctly, I believe) that, according to the principle illustrated in Deut 24:4, for her to go back after marrying another man would be an even worse abomination – it would further compound the sin and the corruption. Read Bro Dowling’s Clapham Change and Clapham Folly. These were circulated to all ecclesias and were generally accepted as the Berean position while Bro Dowling was the editor; and I do not remember of ever hearing that anyone suggested that Bro Dowling should be withdrawn from. To my knowledge, the Richard ecclesia never raised any objection to Clapham Change

and Clapham Folly. Bro Dowling and many others (including Hawley, Whangarei, Lampasas ecclesias, etc.) never accepted the Los Angeles decision as the rule for the Berean Fellowship. They recognized Los Angeles' right to handle their own cases, and accepted Los Angeles' decision in their own case, but not as legislation for the Body.

Clapham Change and Clapham Folly, widely circulated among us for years, are directly opposed to the Dawn position that the couple can never be received back as long as the second marriage continues and is not broken up.

Sin creates very complicated problems. Sometimes there do not seem to be any answers for the problems and complications that people create by sin.

But the general principle of Scripture is that God in his mercy makes provision for bringing good out of evil, and for reconciliation with him, regardless of the mess we have made of our life – if we truly repent.

To insist upon an enforced celibacy of both parties for life thereafter, as a condition of being received back into fellowship, and to force a separation and breaking up of the second marriage, especially where there is a family of young children, is, I believe, going beyond both the spirit and the letter of the law.

Truly this is the easy way to “solve” the problem – put them out and lock the door. It doubtless has appealed to everyone at one time or another because of its simple and easy route to “peace.” Until I could see the force and soundness and Christlikeness of bre Thomas and Robert's position, this “lock the door” solution appealed to me as a simple (though somewhat cowardly and coldhearted) solution – “They made their bed: now let them lie in it: they should have known better in the first place.” I hope God does not treat me like that. We are dealing with the destinies of living creatures like ourselves: not abstractions. It behoves us to be humbly and reverently merciful.

On your specific question, “When does the adultery of an unrighteous second marriage cease to be adultery”, I would answer (just as in any other case of sin), when it is truly repented of. Like murder, it cannot be undone. The new situation has been created. By sin, a marriage has been destroyed, and a new marriage has been created. The facts cannot be changed. It continues to be adultery in God's

sight, right to the judgment seat of Christ, if there is not deep and true repentance. If not repented of, it will mean eternal death.

A man commits one murder, and never murders again. How long is he a murderer in God's sight? David was a murderer. No murderer shall ever enter the kingdom. David could not turn the clock back and undo the murder, but he did sincerely repent, and this repentance was accepted by God, and thus he ceased to be a murderer. If he had not repented, he would have been a murderer forever.

So with adultery. Though a man may commit adultery once, and never again, he is an adulterer forever, until he sincerely repents, and his repentance is accepted.

When does the adultery of the second marriage cease to be adultery? Never. The adultery that terminated the first marriage and created the second is always adultery. Past history cannot be changed.

But the second marriage that was created by the act of sin is not of itself sinful, though it is a consequence and a production of sin. The death of the murder victim stays dead, and this is not sin – though it is the direct result of an act of sin.

It is the wisdom and mercy and love of God that, though its consequences cannot be reversed, sin can be cleansed. The whole plan of salvation is built upon this beautiful principle. The consequences of Adam's one sin were universal disaster: curse, sorrow, pain, toil, evil, strife, suffering and death. They are still with us in full and increasing force. But immediately – IMMEDIATELY – God provided a way of reconciliation and Fellowship for the fallen sinners.

* * *

You do not believe Christ made a new law to deal with adultery. Bre Thomas and Roberts believe that he did, and necessarily so. You believe Jesus simply called attention to the Edenic law.

But consider this: what was the penalty for adultery under the Edenic law – before the law of Moses? That there was a penalty is clear from Job 31:9-11. And that the penalty was death is very clear from Genesis 20:3-7 (God's words to Abimelech when he took Sarah) and Genesis 38:24 (Judah and Tamar). Did Christ reinstate this penalty for adultery under the Edenic law – this penalty that solves the adultery problem very simply and effectively? We know he did not. He did not give us the

right or responsibility of putting adulterers to death, and thus getting rid of the problem.

How then is persistent adultery and uncleanness by one partner to be handled under the law of Christ? Is it to be tolerated and ignored?

You might reply, “put her away, and thenceforth be a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven’s sake, like the beautiful example of John and Christ and Paul”.

Good advice. Doubtless the best course. Doubtless the most Christlike course because it removes giving offense to those that are weak.

Advice, yes. But who are we to presume to make rules for another man’s servant? Bre Thomas and Roberts believed that Christ made a kinder and more practical provision, one that took into consideration man’s constitution, that God has made them alone knows the requirements of. I believe that in this bre Thomas and Roberts discerned the picture better than do those who well-meaningly disagree with them. Bre Thomas and Roberts were not loose or worldly, or tolerant of sin or slack in their handling of God’s word. If we do as well as they, we shall do very well indeed. I do not think we need to worry about having to be holier and harder on sinners than they were.

God has been far more practical, and far less rigid, on this question than those who insist on the “one man, one woman, for life with no exceptions,” which they quote as the “Edenic law”. Truly this is the ideal for marriage, under ideal conditions. It is not THE ideal. The true ideal is exemplified by John the Baptist, Christ and Paul. “If any man can receive it, let him receive it”. Marriage itself is a concession under the present dispensation, and it is sad that those who themselves indulge in this concession sometimes are hard and unmerciful on others who take grateful advantages of other concessions that Christ has made for the weakness of the flesh.

But the “Edenic law” is not the ideal marriage under all circumstances. A higher, less selfish ideal for practical needs is illustrated in the case of a man being required by God to take his brother’s wife (in addition to his own wife) if she were left a widow without seed. And it was a matter of shame to refuse (Deut 25:7-10). What happened to the Edenic law here? God, as he has a perfect right to do, overrode it with a better law for a specific purpose. God is not bound by technicalities, or tied to rigid forms.

What do you think of the polygamy and concubinage of Abraham, the “friend of God” and “father of the faithful?” Or of David, the “man after God’s own heart?” Was this a violation of the “Edenic law”, or was it God exercising his divine prerogative to make different laws at different times as he chooses in his wisdom? Morality is not a dead mathematical formula: it is whatever God at any time legislates in his wisdom for that occasion. Abraham married his sister, and God blessed the union with the child of promise. Under the law of Moses this was an abomination.

God commanded Abraham to divorce Hagar, but at the same time promised to bless Ishmael “because he is thy seed” (Gen 21:10-13).

God said to David, “I gave thee thy master’s wives (note plural) into thy bosom.” (2 Samuel 12:8). How does this fit the Edenic Law?

* * *

You say that if Bro Gibson and I had “held out against this evil,” we would not have had the serious condition we have today. I sincerely believe that if we had done what you asked us to do, we would have had a more serious condition with less scope of improvement. You must permit me this judgment, as I permit you yours.

Neither Bro Gibson nor I have ever wished to see this matter agitated to the point of fellowship and the setting up of new first principles at this late date in the Truth’s history. But what we were faced with was whether we should follow a course that would separate us from sound brethren, or whether we should follow a course that would separate us from unsound brethren.

Inasmuch as others were forcing the issue to the point of fellowship, we had to choose the course that would keep us with sound brethren and with bre Thomas and Roberts and all who have held the Truth from the beginning.

If your understanding of the Los Angeles decision had been forced on the whole brotherhood, or if your Richard Resolution had been forced on the whole brotherhood and to the point of fellowship, then sound brethren would have been forced to leave us.

Your principal point in your letter is that the second marriage is always adultery – a continuing state of adultery – as long as the first partner lives and that they **cannot** be received back into fellowship in this state. You are well aware that those who

have left us on this matter (most of them) directly disagree with you, and say they must be received back if repentant. Do you believe bro Gibson and I should have followed the course that would have kept us from brethren you consider sound on this primary point?

And yet those like Portland who directly disagree with Boston on this main issue have left us and have joined Boston. They cannot fellowship us, but they can with a clear conscience fellowship Boston with whom they directly disagree on the main point at issue – your main point in your letter!

Does this make sense? If it is so important, why this sudden about-face and joining up with those who believe opposite? The whole tenor of your letter is that this is your principal problem in staying with the Bereans –

“You can see my difficulty in being in fellowship with those living in adultery . . . They not only commit adultery but remain in this state of adultery . . . It just amounts to this that it makes the words of Christ of none effect.”

And unless the brethren in Portland have changed recently, they disagree with other aspects of the Boston resolution.

You speak of my “earlier views.” My “earlier views” were that we should take as strong a stand as possible against any thought of divorce and remarriage, fervently praying that we would not have to face the issue, but that if we did have to face it, that would be the time to go into it further. I knew any agitation of it would divide us. I knew there were some sincere brethren who are not prepared to receive the teachings of bre Thomas and Roberts. Why should the subject be agitated, and why should brethren be forced to make decisions prematurely on what has always been a very difficult problem for the brotherhood? Some were determined to agitate it. I was trying to persuade them not to. If the context of my quoted remarks had been fairly given, you would not have been misled as to what my “earlier views” were.

I have never contemplated making new first principle rules or taking a fellowship stand that would legislate bre Thomas and Roberts as unfit for my fellowship (as Boston has now done). I am sure that no one who truly knows and appreciates the history of the Truth in these last days, and the providential position of these brethren in establishing it by their Herculean labors could ever follow this absurd and presumptuous course.

If any brother now living had any kind of a record of accomplishment for the Truth, or comprehension of the depth of the truth, to compare in any way with bre Thomas and Roberts, I would be prepared to give their new views deep and respectful consideration. But there has been no one since them who in any way are comparable with them. They are unique in the latter-day history of the Truth. They are the providential agency which God has used to reestablish the Truth in the earth in these last days.

I ask you, bro Fred, to very seriously and prayerfully consider the views of bre Thomas and Roberts. I went through just what you are going through, but I know fervently and constantly thank God that I am absolutely convinced that bre Thomas and Roberts were right in this matter as in all other matters affecting fellowship in the basic teachings of the Truth. 45 years of experience has convinced me that we are safe and sound in sticking with these brethren on the basic issues. If anyone wants to force this to a fellowship issue (which bre Thomas and Roberts wisely did not), then I must take my stand with these 2 brethren, and regretfully let others set up new fellowship rules if they must.

If we can hold the line, and be as sound and balanced as they were, we shall do very well. It is a tragedy at this late date that brethren feel they must divide the brotherhood on issues where they think they know so much better than they did.

You say, "I will admit bro Roberts has made a few statements in line with your thinking and opposed to my thinking, but you appear to ignore another angle of his teaching in which he makes it clear that if separation does take place they are to remain unmarried."

How can you possibly make that charge when I quote this very point from bro Roberts? See quotation #3 in my article, page 2: –

Question: Can Christadelphians lawfully disannul the marriage contract for any other reason than that given Matthew 5:32? If husband or wife renounce the Truth, does that free the other from the marriage, so that he may marry again?

Bro Roberts answer: "No. 'The Lord hateth putting away' (Mal 2:15) 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth. But if her husband be dead she is at liberty to be married to whom she will: only in the Lord' (1 Cor 7: 39). Nothing disannuls the marriage contract but death and adultery. Incompatibility, from belief

or other cause, may lead to separation, but the separated parties must remain unmarried." (1 Cor 7:11)

Is not this exactly the same answer as you quote from the Guide, No. 45? I agree with what he says in the Guide that you quote. Do you agree with what he says here that I quote?

Are you suggesting that bro Roberts did not know his own mind on the matter, but different things at different times? If so, then consider that the Ecclesial Guide was published in 1883. The quotations I give from him proving that he believed divorce and remarriage were permissible in case of adultery range from 1883 (the year the Guide was published) to 1892, ten years later.

Surely we shall never find the answer if we set bro Roberts against himself. We must, in fairness to him, have an understanding of his writings on this subject that harmonize all parts together, and with the teachings of bro Thomas. This I have done. He said, from beginning to end of all that has been presented from him on this subject, that there can be no divorce and no remarriage – **except** in the case of adultery.

Bro Fred, I appeal to you: is it not very unfair to say that bro Roberts says a "few statements" in line with my thinking, but that I "ignore other aspects of his teaching." No, no! I accept it all as a harmonious whole. My respect for bro Roberts is much higher than to suggest that he spoke with two minds on this matter. He was a giant in the Truth. The more I read of his and about him, the more I am amazed and humiliated. If there were a better knowledge of the labors of these two brethren, and a better, more humble, more thankful appreciation of them, we would not be in the sad shape we are today.

I accept and recognize the scripturalness of all he wrote on this matter. I see perfect harmony in it all – no contradictions. Do You? If you do, then we have no problem, no differences. Do you?

You say I promised to take the "stricter stand," and that I have not done so. What is the "stricter stand"? Is it not that which we sincerely believe to be the closest to the Scriptures? Could anyone conscientiously take any other stand than that which he believed to be the scriptural one? Have we the right to make "stricter" rules than God makes, in our fear for the purity of the Truth? This is a well-meaning error, but

it is a fatal one for the life and spirit of the Truth. This is what happened to the Pharisees. Do we feel we must be “stricter” and more holy than bre Thomas and Roberts? I once felt this way, in my youthful presumption and ignorance, but I am ashamed of it now. If I can just do my tiny little bit to hold the line as bro Thomas and Roberts set it, not deviating to new theories on the right hand or the left, I shall feel very happy, and very privileged and in very good company.

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

Sincerely your brother,

(signed) Rene

Dear brother Fred: Loving Greetings

Jan. 26, 1971

I have gotten a few th

Dear brother Fred: Loving Greetings

Jan. 26, 1971

I have gotten a few thoughts together in answer to your Sept. 13 letter. I would like much more time to present them better and to answer more thoroughly but I feel it best to get it off to you in its present form and extent, as we must be getting on with the Berean. We have not yet had opportunity to start on the January issue. We would very much like some day to catch up and be current with the publication, and we never shall if we do not at least try not to get further behind. We mailed the negatives for November and December issues to bro Don in Houston 2 weeks ago, and thought they were well along in being printed, but he called me last night and said they had never arrived-- apparently they have been lost in the mail, so we shall have to do them over.

In reply to your Sept 13 letter, let me first express what I believe to be your position as expressed therein, so that we may know the points at issue, and you may correct me if I misunderstand you. Your belief is (as I understand it)--

1. Jesus made no law concerning divorce and remarriage.
2. The "Adenic Law" from the beginning was one man, one woman for life. This has never changed except as relaxed temporarily by God through Moses because of "hardness of heart."
3. No divorce is permissible for any reason in this present dispensation.
4. Even if there has been divorce, no second marriage is permissible in the present dispensation while the first partner lives.
5. Christ was not making a new law in Matt 5:32 & 19:9 but simply reaffirming the Adenic law.
6. Christ's exceptions in Mt 5:32 & 19:9 simply say that if the woman is already an adulteress, the man is not causing her to be one by putting her away. The exceptions have no other significance or value.
7. YOUR MAIN POINT: The adultery of the second union continues as adultery as long as the union is continued, and no such couple can ever be received back into fellowship (while the former partner lives) unless they separate and completely cease to be man and wife.

Now against this I would like to place the teachings of brethren Thomas and Roberts, and then to point out why (wherein they differ from your views) I prefer as more reasonable and scriptural their understanding and interpretation of these passages in question.

From the numbered quotations on pages 2&3 of my article of July 1971, the following points of bro. Roberts' consistent convictions on this matter are made irrefutably clear (and in all that anyone has ever produced from bro Thomas on the matter, he was in full agreement with bro Roberts):-

1. "Divorce is inadmissible according to the law of Christ, except in the case he mentions in Mt 19:9. Where this case arises and the parties are divorced, they are at liberty to marry again. Objection may be well meant, but it is without ground" (Quotation #4).
2. "There is nothing in human law or divine to prevent a man marrying again, in whom his wife has been divorced for unfaithfulness" (Qu #5)
3. "Marriage with a divorced woman (he is speaking of divorce for proper cause, as he explains in #10) cannot be put in the category of adultery" (Q. #9)
4. "Christ recognizes no divorce as lawful 'save for the cause of fornication.) in this. This covers the hand" (Q. #10)

5. "There seems nothing difficult about Mt:531-2. The words of Christ amount to this, that his law recognizes no cause of ~~deparation~~ separation between husband and wife except conjugal infidelity..By the law of Christ, a wife put away from any cause 'saving for the cause of fornication' is the man's wife still and anyone carrying her is guilty of adultery. He does not mean tht if divorced from a proper cause, a woman may not marry again. His words must be taken in their connection".(Q. #11)

6. Suing at law for divorce is "highly unscriptural, "an infraction of divine law," a "sin," etc.(Q. #12)

(You will note in passing that bro Roberts repeatedly uses such expressions as 'the Law of Christ,' 'his law,' etc. He clearly did believe Christ made a new law in this matter).

New bro Thomas and Roberts based their convictions on exactly the same passages (Mt5:32 &19:9), as you base yours, yet they saw something very different in these passages than you do, and in some aspects of the matter thy are directly opposed to your conclusions. Have you considered tht it is possible they were r ight and you wrong ?

For a time, bro Fred, this matter troubled me like it is troubling you, and at one time I fervently wished that these brethren had not written these things, just as you wish now. But as in so many other aspects of the Truth, I have found myself forced b y further study and experience closer and closer to the views of our providentially raised-up pioneer brethren.

The whole issue between you and bro Thomas and Roberts hinges in the matter of just what the exceptive phrases mean, and whether they really have any substantive meaning in Christ 's law, or are just a passing reference to a minor aspect.

You say they just mean that if the woman has already committed fornication, the man does not cause her to commit adultery by putting her away because she already has committed adultery and is an adulteress. This would make it rather a purposeless statement on Christ's part--really too obvious to need stating at all

Bro Thomas and Roberts believed that the Exceptive phrases express a truly meaningful and important part of the law--an exception to the general law otherwise defined. They believed that Christ gave a new and necessary law for an entirely new condition in the earth--a condition when for the first time the people of God were not under the sentence of death for adultery.

Adultery cannot be ignored or tolerated, it must be dealt with. If not dealt with, it will completely destroy the institution of marriage, as we see in the world aroundus today, where marriage has become practically meaningless in any true sense.

I believe yow would get a more scripturally balanced picture if you could transfer your emphasis to the destructive, corruptive wickedness and abomination of the sin of adultery, rather than the "sin" of divorce as the solution of the problem of adultery. There is no holiness or benefit in pretending a marriage still exists that has been destroyed by adultery.(Lest this be misunderstood, I repeat that adultery does not destroy a marriage automatically It can, if repented of and abandoned, be forgiven if it has not gone to the point of remarria

Now, on the face of it, the teaching of br3 Thomas and Roberts on the Exceptive Clauses is (to me) a much more logical and reasonable one than yours, Their understanding of it g ives the Clauses real meaning and purpose as a

necessary and inseparable part of the new law being given, while your understanding treats the exceptions as sort of a minor side issue--a passing explanation of a lesser aspect that could be left out without affecting the meaning: that really doesn't need to be there at all, but just expresses something that would be obvious anyway.

In fact, you quote these passages with the exceptions completely deleted, and to you this form is their true meaning.

The understanding of bre Thomas and Roberts is to me the clear meaning of the passages. Bre Roberts actually says, "There seems nothing difficult about Mt 5:32". To him there could be no doubt as to its meaning, and to his quicker perception and very deep comprehension of the spirit of the Truth as exhibited in his voluminous writings, it is easy to see how this could be.

I believe their understanding is the obvious and natural one: your suggested meaning had to be read in, and it is an obvious attempt to explain away what is on the face of it, the clear and natural meaning. (Please do not misunderstand or be offended at the expression 'explain away.' I believe the motive is perfectly sincere and honest. You sincerely feel, in justice to Christ, it has to be so explained away. I felt that way at one time, and I believe I was sincere).

Now, I can see that your suggested meaning is a possible (though not probable) explanation of the exceptive clause in Mt. 5:32. But I cannot see how you can possibly apply this interpretation to Mt. 19:9)--

"Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, shall commit adultery."

How can you fit this with your interpretation that Christ is just saying that as the woman is already an adulteress, she is not being made one? By your interpretation, what does "except for fornication" have to do with whether or not he commits adultery by remarrying?

The exceptive clause here is utterly meaningless and incomprehensible if it is not clearly saying that if a man puts away his wife for fornication, and marries another, he does not commit adultery. This is how bre Thomas and Roberts saw it, and this is how I see it, and can see no other meaning.

When I was struggling with these passages years ago, I felt I must get rid of Mt 19:9 altogether to escape this meaning, and I sincerely tried to get rid of it by searching "authorities" and "versions". But study and experience has convinced me that this passage is genuine, and must be fairly faced and accepted as bre Thomas and Roberts accepted it.

You ask, "If the second marriage is adultery, when and how does it cease to be adultery and become an acceptable marriage?"

This is a fair and reasonable question. I would offer the following points of consideration---

To marry a woman put away for any cause except adultery is itself adultery.

Being adultery, the second marriage terminates the first marriage. It does not do this legally--that is, righteously. It does it wickedly. It is a sin. Until Christ's new law, it was a sin punishable by death (and still is, eventually if not repented of: but the punishment is not to be by man). It is a dreadful one. The scriptures always present adultery as at least as bad as, if not worse than, murder.

According to Christ's law in Mt. 5:32 & 19:9 as bre Thomas and Roberts

(and I) sincerely believe it to be, the terrible sin of adultery terminates the first marriage. It does not, as I have mentioned, always terminate it automatically. A man can forgive his wife if she forsake her sin (as bro Roberts point s out(see Quot.#8 in my letter, page 2), if she has not gone ahead and closed the door by marrying someone else. An adulterous second marriage terminates the first marriage.

In some things, the clock can not be turned back. Once done, the things are done, however sinful, and they have created a new condition that must be faced.

It may be argued that the second marriage should be cancelled, and that the wife should go back to her first husband, but Bro Dowling pointed out9(correctly) I believe)that according to the principle illustrated in Deut 24:1 for her to go back after marrying another man would be an even worse abomination--it would further compound the sin and the corruption. Read bre Dowling 's Clapham Change and Clapham Folly. These were circulated to all ecclesias and were generally accepted as the Berean position while Bro Dowling was the editor and I do not remember of ever hearing that anyone suggested that bre Dowling should be withdrawn from. To my knowledge, the Richard ecclesia never reised any objection to Clapham Change and Clapham Folly. Bro Dowling and many others (including Hawley, Whangarei, Lampasas ecclesias,etc.) never accepted the Los Angeles decision as the rule for the Berean Fellowship. They recognized Los Angeles right to handle their own cases, and accepted LA's decision in their own case, but not as legislation for the Body.

Clapham Change and Clapham Folly, widely circulated among us for years, are directly opposed to the Dawn position that the couple can never be received back as long as the second marriage continues and is not broken up.

Sin creates very complicated problems. Sometimes there do not seem to be answers for the problems and complications that people create by sin.

But the general principle of Scripture is that God in His mercy makes provision for bringing good out of evil, and for reconciliation with Him, regardless of the mess we have made of our life--if we truly repent.

To insist upon an enforced celibacy of both parties for life thereafter, as a condition of being received back into fellowship, and to force a separation and breaking up of the second marriage, especially where there is a family of young children, is, I believe, going beyond both the spirit and the letter of the law.

Truly this is the easy way to "solve " the problem--put them out and lock the door. It doubtless has appealed to every one at one time or another because of it's simple and easy route to "peace." Until I could see the force and soundness and Christlikeness of bre Thomas and Roberts' position, this "lock the door" solution appaled to me as a simple (though somewhat cowardly and cold-hearted) solution--"They made their bed: now let them lie in it: they should have known better in the first place." I hope God does not treat me like that. We are dealing with the destinies of living creatures like ourselves: not abstractions. It behoves us to be humbly and reverently merciful.

On your specific question, When does the adultery of an unrighteous second marriage cease to be adultery, I would answer, just as in any other case of sin, when it is truly repented of. Like murder, it cannot be undone. The new situation has been created. By sin, a marriage has been destroyed, and a new marriage has been created. The facts cannot be changed. It continues to be adultery in God's sight, right to the judgement seat of Christ, if there is not deep and true repentance. If not repented of, it will mean eternal death.

A man commits one murder, and never murders again. How long is he a murderer in God's sight? David was a murderer. No murderer shall ever enter the Kingdom. David could not turn the clock back and undo the murder, but he did sincerely repent, and this repentance was accepted by God, and thus he ceased to be a murderer. If he had not repented, he would have been a murderer forever.

So with adultery. Tho a man may commit adultery once, and never again, he is as adulterer forever, until he sincerely repent, and his repentance is accepted.

When does the adultery of the second marriage cease to be adultery? Never. The adultery that terminated the first marriage and created the second is always adultery. Past history cannot be changed.

But the second marriage that was created by the act of sin is not of itself sinful, though it is a consequence and a production of sin. The death of the murder victim stays dead, and this is not sin--though it is the direct result of an act of sin.

It is the wisdom and mercy and love of God that, though its consequences cannot be reversed, sin can be cleansed. The whole plan of salvation is built upon this beautiful principle. The consequences of Adam's one sin were universal; disaster: curse, sorrow, pain, toil, evil, strife, suffering and death. They are all still with us in full and increasing force. But immediately--IMMEDIATELY--God provided a way of reconciliation and fellowship for the fallen sinners.

You do not believe Christ made a new law to deal with adultery. Bre Thomas and Roberts believed that he did, and necessarily so. You believe Jesus simply called attention to the Edenic Law.

But consider this: What was the penalty for adultery under the Edenic Law--before the Law of Moses? That there was a penalty is clear from Job 31:9-11/ and that the penalty was death is very clear from Gen 20:3-7 (God's words to Abimelech when he took Sarah) and Gen 38:24 (Judah and Tamar). Did Christ reinstate this penalty for adultery under the Edenic Law--this penalty that solves the adultery problem very simply and effectively? We know he did not. He did not give us the right or responsibility of putting adulterers to death, and thus getting rid of the problem.

How then is persistent adultery and uncleanness by one partner to be handled under the Law of Christ? Is it to be tolerated and ignored?

You might reply, "Put her away, and thenceforth be a eunuch for the Kingdom of heaven's sake, like the beautiful example of John and Christ and Paul"

Good advice. Doubtless the best course. Doubtless the most Christlike course because it removes giving offence to those that are weak.

Advice, yes. But who are we to presume to make rules for another man's servant? Bre Thomas and Roberts believed that Christ made a kinder and more practical provision one that took into consideration man's constitution, that God has made and alone knows the requirements of. I believe that in this Bre Thomas and Roberts discerned the picture better than do those who well-meaningly disagree with them. Bre Thomas and Roberts were not loose or worldly, or tolerant of sin or slack in their handling of God's Word. If we do as well as they, we shall do very well indeed. I do not think we need to worry about having to be holier and harder on sinners than they were.

God has been far more practical, and far less rigid, on this question than those who insist on the "one man, one woman, for life with no exceptions,"

• which they quote as the "Edenic Law". Truly this is the ideal for marriage, under ideal conditions. It is not THE ideal. The TRUE ideal is exemplified by John the Baptist, Christ and Paul. "If any man can receive it, let him receive it". Marriage itself is a concession under the present dispensation, and it is sad that those who themselves indulge in this concession sometimes are hard and unmerciful on others who take grateful advantage of other concessions that Christ has made for the weakness of the flesh.

But the "Edenic Law" is not the ideal marriage under all circumstances/ A higher, less selfish ideal for practical needs is illustrated in the case of a man being required by God to take his brother's wife (in addition to his own wife) if she were left a widow without seed. And it was a matter of shame to refuse (Deut. 25:7-10). What happened to the Edenic Law here? God, as He has a perfect right to do, overrode it with a better law for a specific purpose. God is not bound by technicalities, or tied to rigid forms.

What do you think of the polygamy and concubinage of Abraham, the "Friend of God" and "Father of the Faithful"? Or of David, the "Man after God's Own heart."? Was this a violation of the "Edenic Law", or was it God exercising His divine prerogative to make different laws at different times as He chooses in His wisdom? Morality is not a dead mathematical formula: it is whatever God at any time legislates in His wisdom for that occasion. Abraham married his sister, and God blessed the union with the child of promise. Under the Law of Moses this was an abomination.

God commanded Abraham to divorce Hagar, but at the same time promised to bless Ishmael "because he is the seed" (Gen 21:10-13).

God said to David, "I gave thee thy master's wives (note plural) into thy bosom." (2Sam 12:8). How does this fit the Edenic Law?

You say that if bro Gibson and I had "held out against this evil," we would not have had the serious condition we have today. I sincerely believe that if we had done what you asked us to do, we would have had a more serious condition with less hope of improvement. You must permit me this judgment, as I permit you yours.

Neither bro Gibson nor I have ever wished to see this matter agitated to the point of fellowship and the setting up of new First Principles at this late date in the Truth's history. But what we were faced with was whether we should follow a course that would separate us from sound brethren, or whether we should follow a course that would separate us from unsound brethren.

Inasmuch as others were forcing the issue to the point of fellowship, we had to choose the course that would keep us with sound brethren and with bro Thomas and Roberts and all who have held the Truth from the beginning.

If your understanding of the Los Angeles decision had been forced on the whole Brotherhood, or if your Richard Resolution had been forced on the whole Brotherhood to the point of fellowship, then sound brethren would have been forced to leave us.

Your principal point in your letter is that the second marriage is always adultery--a continuing state of adultery--as long as the first partner lives and that they cannot be received back into fellowship in this state. You are well aware that those who have left us on this matter (most of them) directly disagree with you, and say they must be received back if repentant. Do you believe bro Gibson and I should have followed a course that would have kept us from brethren you consider sound on this primary point?

And yet those like Portland who directly disagree with Boston on this main

Issue, have left us and have joined Boston. They cannot fellowship us, but they can with a clear conscience fellowship Boston with whom they directly disagree on the main point at issue--your main point in your letter!

Does this make sense? if it is so important, why this sudden about face and joining up with those who believe opposite? The whole tenor of your letter is that this is your principal problem in staying with the Bereans--

"You can see my difficulty in being in fellowship with those living in adultery..they not only commit adultery but remain in this state of adultery.. It just amounts to this that it makes the words of Christ of none effect."

And unless the brethren in Portland have changed recently, they disagree with other aspects of the Boston resolution.

You speak of my "earlier views.". My "earlier views" were that we should take as strong a stand as possible against any thought of divorce and remarriage fervently praying that we would not have to face the issue, but that if we did have to face it, that would be the time to go into it further. I knew any agitation of it would divide us. I knew there were some sincere brethren who were not prepared to receive the teachings of bre Thomas and Roberts. Why should the subject be agitated, and why should brethren be forced to make decisions prematurely on what has always been a very difficult problem for the Brotherhood? Some were determined to agitate it. I was trying to persuade them not to. If the context of my quoted remarks had been fairly given, you would not have been misled as to what my "earlier views" were.

I have never contemplated making new first principle rules or taking a fellowship stand that would legislate bre Thomas and Roberts as unfit for my fellowship (as Boston has now done). I am sure that no one who truly knows and appreciates the history of the Truth in these last days, and the providential position of these brethren in establishing it by their herculean labors could ever follow this absurd and presumptuous course.

If any brother now living had any kind of a record of accomplishment for the Truth, or comprehension of the depth of the Truth, to compare in any way with bre Thomas and Roberts, I would be prepared to give their new views deep and respectful consideration. But there has been no one since them who in any way are comparable with them. They are unique in the latterday history of the Truth. They are the providential agency which God has used to reestablish the Truth in the earth in these last days.

I ask you, bro Fred, to very seriously and prayerfully consider the views of bre Thomas and Roberts. I went through just what you are going through, but I now fervently and constantly thank God that I am absolutely convinced that bre Thomas and Roberts were right in this matter as in all other matters affecting fellowship and the basic teachings of the Truth. Forty-five years of experience has convinced me that we are safe and sound in sticking with these brethren on the basic issues. If anyone wants to force this to a fellowship issue(which bre Thomas and Roberts wisely did not), then I must take my stand with these 2 brethren, and regretfully let others set up new fellowship rules if they must!

If we can hold the line, and be as sound and balanced as they were, we shall do very well. It is a tragedy at this late date that brethren feel they must divide the Brotherhood on issues where they think they know so much better than they did.

You say: "I will admit bro Roberts has made a few statements in line with

ou thinking and opposed to my thinking, but you appear to ignore another angle of his teaching in which he makes it clear that if separation does take place they are to remain unmarried."

How can you possibly make that charge when I quote this very point from Roberts? See Quotation #3 in my article, page 2:--

Question: Can Christadelphians lawfully disannul the marriage contract for any other reason than that given in Mt 5:32? If husband or wife renounce the Truth, does that free the other from the marriage, so that he may marry again.?

Bro Roberts' Answer: "NO." "The Lord hateth putting away' (Mal2;15) 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth. But if her husband be dead she is at liberty to be married to whom she will: only in the Lord' (1 Cor 7:39) Nothing disannuls the marriage contract but death and adultery. Incompatibility, from belief or other cause, may lead to separation, but the separated parties must remain unmarried' (1 cor. 7:11)

Is not this exactly the same answer as you quote from the Guide, No 15? I agree with what he says in the Guide that you quote. Do you agree with what he says here that I quote?

Are you suggesting that bro Roberts did not know his own mind on the matter, but wrote different things at different times? If so, then consider that the Ecclesial Guide was published in 1883. The quotations I give from him proving that he believed divorce and remarriage were permissible in case of adultery range from 1883 (the year the Guide was published) to 1892, ten years later.

Surely we shall never find the answer if we set bro Roberts against himself. I must, in fairness to him have an understanding of his writings on this subject that harmonize all parts together, and with the teachings of bro Thomas This I have done. He said, from beginning to end of all that has been presented from him on this subject, that there can be no divorce and no remarriage--except in the case of adultery.

Bro Fred, I appeal to you: is it not very unfair to say that bro Roberts says a "few statements" in line with my thinking, but that I "ignore other aspects of his teaching." No, no! I accept it all as a harmonious whole. My respect for bro Roberts is much higher than to suggest that he spoke with two minds on this matter. He was a giant in the Truth. The more I read of his and about him, the more I am amazed and humiliated. If there were a better knowledge of the labors of these 2 brethren, and a better, more humble, more thankful appreciation of them, we would not be in the sad shape we are today.

I accept and recognize the scripturalness of all he wrote on this matter. I see perfect harmony in it all--no contradictions. Do You? If you do, then we have no problem, no differences. Do you?

You say I promised to take the "stricter stand," and that I have not done so. What is the "stricter stand"? Is it not that which we sincerely believe to be the closest to the Scriptures? Could anyone conscientiously take any other stand than that which he believed to be the scriptural one? Have we the right to make "stricter" rules than God makes, in our fear for the purity of the Truth? This is a well-meaning error, but it is a fatal one for the life and spirit of the Truth. This is what happened to the Pharisees. Do we feel we must be "stricter" than the Scriptures? Do we feel we must be "stricter" than bro Thomas and Roberts? I once felt this way, in

and more holy than bro Thomas & Roberts? I once felt this way, in my youthful presumption & ignorance, but I am ashamed of it now. If I can just do my tiny little bit to hold the line as bro Thomas & Roberts set it, not deviating to new theories on the right hand or the left, I shall feel very happy, and very privileged, and in very good company, with much love in the Truth to yourself & all in Richard, Sincerely your bro. Rene.