

## IS IT LAWFUL TO MARRY UNBELIEVERS?

### Letter from brother THOMAS to certain brethren in Britain.

To them in... .., who are there “the sanctified in Christ Jesus,” favour be unto you, and peace from the Deity, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, for whose speedy manifestation they are all professedly waiting, and earnestly desiring.

In the words of the great teacher of the Gentiles, in whom was the mind of Christ, “I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the *same thing*, and that there be *no divisions* among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.” For it hath been delivered to me of you, my brethren, by our beloved ... .. with the request that I would address you, that there are contentions among you not at all creditable to you as “Brethren of Christ,” by which designation we have taken our stand as his Faithful Witness (Antipas.) Is it so, then, that after so many years’ study of the enlightening word, ye are yet carnal? For whereas there is said to be among you strife and divisions; are ye not carnal, and walk as men? Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Deity, if he have any temple in your locality? and that “the Spirit which is the truth” dwelleth, or ought to dwell, in you? Now, if any man defile this temple by divisions, and unnecessary contentions and strifes, him will the Deity destroy; for his temple is holy, which temple I trust ye are.

If then ye be this temple, ye are Christ’s house, “the Ecclesia of the Deity,” and, therefore, if faithful to him who hath invited you out of heathen darkness into his marvellous light, ye are “the pillar and support of the truth,” in the place of your sojourning. Hence you are collectively “stewards of the mysteries of the Deity,” which are foolishness to “the wise and prudent” of this generation. Now it is required in stewards that they be found faithful, and that they keep their accounts correctly, so that when the Lord comes they may not be put to shame in his presence. But, as stewards, are you fulfilling this necessity, while contending and striving to the disruption of the congregation, and the abolition of the table of the Lord in its midst? It is good and wholesome to “contend earnestly for the faith, once for all delivered to the saints,” as in past years you have against the Laodiceans; such a contention as this will never divide a healthy body. It will cause it to grow with the increase of the Deity; but to contend for anything short of this, or irrelevant to it, develops only confusion and every evil work.

I need not tell you as ignorant of it, hut because you know it; and by way of reminding you of what you know, that the sanctified in Christ Jesus, are those, and only those, who believe, “the things of the kingdom of the Deity, and the name of Jesus Christ,” with a faith unspoiled by crotchets and traditions; a “faith that works by love,” of these covenanted things; and are immersed thereupon into Jesus Christ. These are “the saints”; and “do you not know that the saints shall judge the world, and angels too”; that “judgment shall be given to them under the whole heaven”; and that in their execution of it, they shall cause wars and contentions, and strifes to cease to the end of the world? Do you not know, beloved brethren, that this is your mission, if accepted as the called and faithful, and chosen? And do you not know also, that the grand principle of the Divine

Oracles to be practically developed in the saints while trodden under foot of the Gentiles, is *absolute unconditional, obedience to the truth*? The Holy and the Just One was not exempted from this necessity; for “he learned obedience, by the things which he suffered;” and when perfected, in ascending to the Father’s nature, he was promoted to the command of angels and the world. But it is said that there are contentions among you, which have baptized you in a “sea of trouble.” Is it indeed so, that the truth hath not power in your midst to preserve you from division and confusion? If you cannot maintain peace and unanimity among yourselves, how will you ever become morally fit to command the peace of the world, and to maintain it? Is not this to your shame? Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that is able to straighten out any difficulty that may arise among you?

Now, therefore there is utterly a fault among you. What is it? Are any of your number possessed of the old demon of Puritanism, that would not permit a woman to kiss her child on “the sabbath day,” because it broke the sabbath, and savored of the flesh? and that would not allow a man to work a ferry boat unless he were a member of the church or “in the Lord?” A demon that burned witches and hanged quakers, because they did not pronounce Shibboleth aright. Beloved brethren, human nature is always tending to extremes, and transcending what is written. As the saying is, it will strain out gnats, and swallow camels by the herd. It set up the Inquisition, and is essentially and always inquisitorial, and incessantly prying into matters beyond its jurisdiction. It is very fond of playing the judge, and of executing its own decrees. It has a zeal, but not according to knowledge, and therefore, its zeal is intemperate, and not the zeal of wisdom, or knowledge rightly used. It professes great zeal for the purity of the church, and would purge out everything that offends its sensitive imagination. But is it not a good thing to have a church without tares, without a black sheep, or spotted heifer? Yea, verily, it is an excellent thing. But, then, it is a thing the Holy Spirit has never yet developed; and cannot now be developed by any human judiciary in the administration of spiritual affairs. There are certain things that must be left to the Lord’s own adjudication when he comes; as it is written, “He that judgeth is the Lord. Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come; who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of the Deity”- (1 Corinthians 4:5; Revelation 11:18) - “every man,” whose hidden things and heart-counsels when brought to light will be accounted worthy much of praise. Does not this teach us how more important it is that brethren be more diligent in *examining themselves* than in examining other brethren; and that the Lord expects them to leave something for him to do in the way of judging, condemning, excommunicating, cutting off, and casting out, in “the time of the dead that they should be judged?” “Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be *teleia* perfect.”- (1 Corinthians 14:20)

Do not suppose that I write these things to shame you; no, but as beloved brethren, to warn you. I think the “sea of trouble,” in which your barque is pitching, and lurching, and beating about, may have suggested some ideas that will prove useful in its future navigation. Did you ever hear of a ship going to sea, and making a successful voyage without captain, pilot, mates, &c , in which all the crew were captains and pilots, and

each one did what was right in his own eyes? Does not the New Testament reason, and the experience of society teach you, that to maintain decency and order in an assembly of man and woman, there must be an official staff, whose business it is to prevent confusion and evil works by the application of the rules and principles upon which the assembly is based? Human nature is the devil, the flesh of sin, in which dwells no good thing; and its propensities and lusts are always ready for mischief. It is against this common and universal enemy we all have to fight, and defend the NEW MAN: the inner man, created by knowledge, fed by knowledge, caused to grow by knowledge; by the knowledge of the unadulterated milk of the word, assimilated to what he is, as milk to the nature of a babe. But there are diversities among New Men, as there are differences among Old Ones of mere flesh. New men are not all of equal stature, equal age, equal intelligence, equal wisdom, equal faith. Some are babes, others are young and strong men; others, wise fathers, who are not only strong, but sagacious in counsel. Now what doth reason teach you in view of this scripture fact? If you constitute an assembly of New Men with these diversities, and ye have cases and questions, or difficulties; or, in Paul's words, "If ye have judgment of things pertaining to this life, would ye set them to judge who are contemptible" in the ecclesia? - *contemptible*, mere babes, who, *as judges*, would be contemptible? It seems that in Corinth they had done this. Instead of appointing wise fathers in Christ, they set the least entitled to consideration in the ecclesia to judge, and the consequence was the greatest disorder and confusion. Therefore Paul wrote saying, "I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one who shall be able to judge between his brethren?"

But, brethren, I think you have some wise men among you, and that if you had constituted them your *witenagemote*, to attend to "judgments of things pertaining to this life," instead of heedlessly proclaiming them to all without any previous counsel you would have escaped submergence in the abyss in which you are unable to touch bottom, and, therefore, to you, a "bottomless pit." Are you all babes, all young men, all fathers? This is not to be supposed. There are diversities among you as in all other congregations; and, as a general rule, the babes are greatly in the majority. These have had knowledge enough to attain to "the obedience of faith" for remission of sins, and "aright to the tree of life;" but they have not knowledge and experience combined to qualify them for "judgments of things pertaining to this life," according to the letter and spirit of the word. Babes, or "novices," being deficient in judicial wisdom, should not be appealed to as judges. Their attention should be concentrated on the truth, and not diverted from it by questions, about which even wise men in Christ are not agreed.

Then what do scripture, reason, and experience dictate? *Firstly*, that you ignore the past follies you may have committed, and return to the *as-you-were*, before division was made. *Secondly*, that you drop the subject for the time being; or, at least, until the wise men among you see eye to eye, and understand it in all its circumstances. *Thirdly*, agree not to discuss before all babes in Christ things you do not thoroughly understand, and which tend only to corrupt their minds from "the simplicity that is in Christ." *Fourthly*, do not come, to hasty conclusions on doubtful matters, and then try to force them upon one another. *Fifthly*, do not act as wayward children, and because you cannot have your own way, shy off in a tangent, and turn your backs pettishly on one another. *Sixthly*,

choose a council of the wisest men among you, and let them be your *Witenagemote*. Consult privately with them upon all things you desire to ventilate, and do not trouble the congregation in its public meetings. In these it meets to be instructed, to be edified, to be comforted, to be strengthened, to be warned, to be prepared for the apocalypse of the Lord and Judge of all. It comes together also in obedience to Him, to keep the ordinances delivered “by the apostles,” not to debate and strive, and talk vanity, which tends only to vexation of spirit. Whatever is submitted to the congregation, let it be through the counsel of wise men in Christ you may appoint, and let them submit nothing they do not thoroughly understand, and upon which they are not unanimous. Let the truth be king in your midst, speaking and ruling through faithful men, who are at once intelligent in the word, wise in the use of it, and good. With a council of such men you will prosper, and all your affairs will be attended to decently, decorously, and in order; which, however objectionable to professors of factious tendencies, whose worship is the admiration of their own vagaries, will be well pleasing to the Deity, “who is not the author of confusion, but of peace, on all ecclesias of the saints.”

In the letter before me, I am asked if marriage is a civil or a religious institution? Well, if by “civil” we understand relating to citizens and the state, it is civil; and, if by “religious,” that which is ecclesiastical, it is religious also; for both the State and “the Church,” as they call the names and denominations of the apostasy, regulate and dissolve it at their pleasure.

But, I suppose, the real question is, was marriage originally a divine or merely a human institution? If this is meant, the answer is, it was divinely instituted in the implantation of the sexual organism in our nature, and in the creation of one of each sex, the one being taken out of the other, and in the command, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.” All this was arranged before sin entered into the world, and, consequently, before religion (which is the system of means for the healing of the breach made by sin) was ordained. The Laodicean apostasy has made matrimony a “holy sacrament of the church,” which the same apostasy has forbidden to its pseudonymous “holy priests!” It is, however, no part of Christianity, or of Judaism. These only *regulate* it for the special benefit of Israel, and Israel’s lords, the saints. The world of outer darkness is a law to itself, and orders it to suit its own notions of right, The law of Moses allowed a plurality of wives, and divorce, and punished the “social evil” with death. Jesus, who was “made under the law,” did not interfere with the law, but forbade divorce upon any other ground than the wife’s unfaithfulness. The apostles, whose authority he declared equal to his own in teaching the things of Deity, allowed divorce on another ground, and for the sake of peace to the Christian party. But to carry out this gospel liberty would place a man or woman as a criminal at the bar of Gentile justice and law. Therefore, Peter has said; “Submit yourselves to *every* ordinance of man, for the Lord’s sake;” provided, of course, that in so doing, his precepts were not transgressed: this apostolic tradition applies also to their ordinances of marriage. They forbid two contemporary wives, allow divorce on unscriptural grounds, and tolerate the “social evil” to any extent without punishment. Hence, a saint regulated by the word, would have only one wife at a time; he would seek divorce only on scriptural grounds, and avoid the “social evil” as the plague. After this manner is the human amateness *regulated* by the Word, and placed by the New Man in

subordination to it.

There is another question proposed, namely, “*Does a believer commit sin in marrying an unbeliever?*” What is sin? Paul says, “It is the transgression of law;” but it is also written, that “where there is no law there is no transgression.” Paul delivers a judgment which he thinks would be approved by the Deity; and no doubt it would. But he does not lay it down as a law. He says, a widow is at liberty to marry “only in the Lord,” but *he does not threaten her with any penalty* if she did not take his advice. And, as Paul prescribed no punishment, I see no reason why you should be more stringent than the apostle. Offer your advice as he did; show the possible evils that might come upon her in so marrying, if she take your advice, it is well; if not, so much the worse for her, perhaps; yet, you have done what you considered right; more than this should be left for the Lord’s adjudication when he comes.

But the question; “Doth the believer commit sin in marrying an unbeliever?” is too vague for a direct affirmative or negative reply. There were some in Paul’s day, as in ours, who believed “the truth as it is in Jesus,” but who, from various considerations, did not obey it. Might an *obedient* believer marry such a believer? If she married such a believer, would Paul have turned her over to cursing, and have ordered a majority of babes in Christ, under a threat of his displeasure, to turn her out of the church? or, in the event that such a majority could not be created, would he have turned mulish, kicked up his heels, and galloped off with Sosthenes and Titus, to break a factious loaf in solitude? Would he have acted in this arbitrary, unseemly, and mulish fashion, and have thus determined his future to his beloved sons in Corinth? I am certain he would have done no such thing, as is apparent from the evidence of his whole letter, bearing on the case of that great criminal who had his father’s wife; and if incest did not drive him into non-fellowship, how can brethren of Christ justify themselves in dividing, or, perhaps, breaking up the ecclesia, or withdrawing themselves from its ordinances, not because a sister *had* “sinned,” but because she said she was *going* to do what, perhaps, you have all done before her!! Brethren, this is mere child’s play; it is converting the ordinances of Christ into mere playthings, for the sport of those who think and act as children of the flesh—a course of conduct infinitely more sinful and reprehensible than a brother or a sister marrying one who might even be an idolater. I say, than an idolater; for Paul commanded his brethren and sisters, if married to such an one, not to seek divorce, but to remain peacefully “in the same calling wherein they were called;” or “if bound to a wife, not to seek to be loosed;” for their remaining together legitimized their children, and, consequently, their own union, (1 Corinthians 7:14;) and might result in saving the worshipper of idols, or the Jew, as the case might be.

Now, “unbelievers,” in Paul’s use of the word, in 2 Corinthians 6:14, stands for Jews and Gentiles who hated Jesus, and denied his claims to be the anointed of the Deity, or a manifestation of Deity in our flesh. They said, Jesus is not the Christ, but a mere man, an impostor. Added to this the Gentiles denied the existence of the one living and true Deity, and worshipped stocks and stones; and in their worship committed acts too obscene to be written here. This all was Belial, or wickedness, which was domesticated in all the families of the Greeks and Latins. Such were those Whom Paul styles “unbelievers.”

Could a sister, (if married to one such) who had been widowed by his decease, marry such another again without sin? Or, could any sister marry such an one with Christ's and Paul's approval? By no means. Her act would prove that she loved Belial, or wickedness, better than Christ, or the righteousness of God. But, if she did so marry, in spite of the advice of Crispus and Gaius, she herself would be the sufferer. Should they, therefore, inflict more punishment upon her by anticipation, in getting the church to cut her off, and cast her adrift upon the sole protection of the infidel, and not this only, but punish *all their brethren* by divorcing them, because she did not take their advice?

But, is there no moral difference between Paul's infidels or unbelievers, and the misbelievers of our day? Misbelievers acknowledge the existence of the Eternal Spirit, and that Jesus is Christ, the Son of Deity; that he died for sin, and rose again, and is now at the right hand of power. But, because of their ignorance, they do not believe the doctrine he taught, and commanded the apostles to teach, Yet, they are very conscientious, admire his character greatly, and are as correct in their deportment, socially, as the most enlightened saint. Nevertheless, they cannot be saved, because they conform not to the conditions of the truth, not through wickedness, but through not being able to find the truth; for "many shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able." If a saint married such a misbeliever, would it be sin? And, if it be sin, which I propose you postpone for the Lord's decision, as the sister in question will perhaps do, if she take not your well-meant advice. If it be sin, I say, with Paul's example before us it is beyond your competency, dearly beloved brethren, scripturally to curse her, or to expel her from the church.

The passage in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," does not seem to refer *directly* to marriage. Indirectly, however, it does. It is an injunction not to be slighted, and indicates *a general principle* which it would be well for all the faithful to observe, in all the relations of life. But marriage establishes the most intimate fellowship between the subjects thereof; if, therefore, it would be wrong for a Christian man to yoke himself with an atheistic and blaspheming Jew or Pagan in secular affairs, how much more reprehensible would it be for him to yoke himself with an atheistic, blasphemous, or fashionable and silly woman of the world. This would be an unequal yoking of an intensely immoral character- a touching of the unclean, that would in the judgment, probably, bring upon the believer the reprehension of the Lord Almighty. It would be a yoking very dangerous to experiment upon. Indeed, I doubt if any man truly enlightened, and earnestly devoted to the truth, could, by any possibility, be induced to subject himself to the defilement and intolerable nuisance of companionship with an ignorant, idolatrous, superstitious, and blasphemous anti-christian woman. Such a union could hardly be termed that of Christ and Belial; for, surely, Christ could not be in the man who would permit such a yoke to come upon his neck.

But, would the case be parallel, if a Christian were yoked, in trade or marriage, with an amiable, well-disposed, tractable, and God-fearing misbeliever? Would he not be more unequally yoked if united to one who had by immersion been placed, technically, "in the Lord;" but whose walk was like too many females amongst us, characterized by the outward adornment of the toilet, the bedizening of their persons with jewellery, the

fashionable putting on of apparel, backbiting, evil gossip, and so forth, to the neglect of the adornment of “the hidden man of the heart,” in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of the Deity, is of great price? Do not many misbelievers put these technical believers “in the Lord” to shame? Is it not a risky thing in this nineteenth century, when “the truth as it is in Jesus,” is so imperfectly understood, so little appreciated, and has so little practical influence upon the conduct of professors, for genuine believers to ally themselves with those who are technically said to be “in the Lord?” If men and women “in the Lord” were really and truly what that phrase scripturally imports; if they were the legitimate sons and daughters of Abraham and Sarah in well doing-there would be no risk of making shipwreck of peace, and patience, and domestic harmony in their being yoked together : but alas, our experience in this hemisphere proves it to be as hazardous to spiritual welfare, to marry technically “in the Lord,” as to marry a misbeliever; so that it would seem almost the safer course to imitate the example of Paul, and not be yoked at all.

Things, then, in relation to “believers” and misbelievers in our day being thus, brethren should not legislate and arbitrarily affect one another in regard to the matter. Let every one be judged in their own case till the Lord come. If one marry a misbeliever, and he find he have married unhappily, he is the sufferer, not you who advised him to the contrary. In doing this, you have relieved yourself of all responsibility in the case. All that remains for you to do, is to make the best of the situation, by making yourselves as agreeable as possible; and using all the influence you may thus acquire in teaching the misbeliever “the way of the Lord more perfectly.” This is far better than “cutting off” a brother or a sister, and accounting them as heathens and publicans, because they do not accept your views of the subject as infallible, and as little to be questioned as the decrees of God. And remember, beloved brethren, we are not to do evil that good may come, any more than we should sin that grace may abound. Paul exhorts you to “mark them who cause divisions and offences *contrary to the doctrine*” *he taught*. You are all of one faith, one hope, one Lord, one baptism, one body. In these things, it is said, you agree, why then do you allow doubtful questions to divide you? You compass only evil by such a course. No possible good can come out of it. Your contentions and divisions bring reproach upon the truth, you ought to throw all your energy into this for its support; and not waste time and power in vain strife by which you crucify it, and put it to an open shame, and make yourselves a by-word in the lips of hypocrites and sinners. “Let your moderation be known unto all; the *Lord is at hand*.” Dare any of you work confusion among the friends of unadulterated truth in view of this fact? I beseech you, brethren, one and all, change your course and “be of the same mind in the Lord” which is much more important for you, than disputing about marrying in the Lord;” for this I say brethren, **THE TIME IS SHORT**: it remaineth that both they who have wives be as though they had none; and they who weep as though they wept not; and they who rejoice as though they rejoiceth not; they who buy as though they possessed not; and they who use this world as not using in excess; for the fashion of this world passeth away.” Therefore in these things be without carefulness, that you may please the Lord.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, holy, just, pure, amiable and commendable; if there be any goodness, any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have

both learned, received, heard and may see of Paul's example as exhibited in his writings, do, and the God of peace will be with you, and supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the energy whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself; unto him be glory in the undivided ecclesia with Christ Jesus, during all the generations of the *Aeon of the Aeons*. *Amen*.

Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. And desiring only that the truth may prosper, I add my own salutation on subscribing myself faithfully and affectionately your brother, in the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.

JOHN THOMAS

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