

Missing The Point.

In the Christadelphian for November 1873, page 520, is a notice headed "To the Point." It may be judged from the style of this piece that the author thought it to be of the weighty and conclusive order. "Who will contradict it?" he cries, like Goliath of Gath. We answer, that it is already contradicted by the word of God.

The Editor, Robert Roberts, affirms that "when the apostles spoke of the flesh they meant mortal flesh of men." We must pause to consider.

If we too hastily admit Bro. Roberts's proposition, we shall perhaps be led to his conclusion. Is it true, then, that when the apostles spoke of the flesh, they always meant the mortal flesh of men? We think every reader of "To the Point" will understand that, by this leading proposition, Bro. Roberts means to say that whenever the apostles speak of human flesh they mean flesh under sentence of death, or, as he phrases it elsewhere in contradiction to his own teaching on the subject, 'flesh full of sin'.

It is in this sense of his question, we say, first the scriptures contradict it. The piece before us is not concerned with every passage in which the apostles speak of the flesh; it is concerned with certain verses in John's epistles. In these John does not use the word 'the' before the word 'flesh'. Both in his first and second epistles he omits the article, and says, 'in flesh.' John did not do this by accident. Three times over he employs this form of words. True, the authorised English version reads "in the flesh." Perhaps Bro. Roberts will discover that here, as in Romans 8:3, it is a question of idiom!

An idiom is a particular mode of speech; a form of words in one language which will not make sense, if translated by the same words into another language. But it is not so either with Romans 8:3, or with the verses in John. In order to understand a particular phrase, regard must be had to the context, and the subject against or in favour of which the phrase is used. In Romans 7:5; 8:8 & 9, Paul, speaking of the lusts of the flesh, and of the law of Moses which was "a carnal ordinance," employs the words "in the flesh" and "in flesh"; but anyone may see that he is not speaking of literal "mortal flesh;" for how could he say to the Roman believers "when we were in the flesh"? And again, "But ye are not "in flesh"? Well, then, here in the second place are several texts in which the apostle spoke of "the flesh" and of "flesh," when nothing, we think, is plainer than that he did not mean "mortal flesh of men."

When it is desired to investigate a subject by the process of question and answer, all the questions must be fair and pointed. They must not include what is not needful, nor must they omit what is. A judge sometimes reminds counsel that his question is unfair; sometimes he will say, I think you ought not to put your question in that form. A competent judge would do likewise with respect to Bro. Roberts's proposition that "the flesh" always means "mortal flesh of men." It is clear from what goes before, that such is not always its meaning, and it is also clear that John did not use the words "the flesh," or "in the flesh;" but "in flesh." Bro Roberts has great faith in "the Socratic method." There is no reason to dislike it when properly employed; but from what we know of Socrates, we do not think he would have been so mean and unstraightforward as to ask a grossly unfair question, or to put forward a misleading proposition. The beloved apostle's denunciation of certain antichrists, for there were divers sorts, can only be understood in a clear and critical manner through an acquaintance with the doctrines they held. A periodical, professing a rigid critical accuracy in regard to matters of faith "Eighteen hundred years ago," ought certainly to have someone on its staff, either editor or contributor, sufficiently well-read to enable it to fulfil its high promise.

Standard works, on ecclesiastical history, bring us face to face with the antichrist protested against so forcibly by John. They make us acquainted with a powerful sect flourishing in John's time and long afterwards, who denied absolutely that Christ came in flesh of any kind whatever. It was not with them a question at all of "mortal flesh of men," or flesh of angels, or any other sort. Their belief was a denial of all flesh in the matter. They did not profess to define what the substance of the body of the Lord was; they denied that it was a substance at all.

The following citation, kindly sent to us some months ago by a friend of the truth, will help to make the subject plain and interesting: "The Docetes and Cerinthian heretics who lived in the time of John, maintained that the pure Word was the Christ, the Son of God, abstracted from and independent of all humanity. The Docetes maintained that the Sagas assumed the outward shape and visible appearance of a mortal, but they denied that He was clothed with a real body, or that He suffered really, believing that He was altogether an airy immaterial phantom, who, instead of issuing from the womb of the virgin, descended on the banks of the Jordan in the form of perfect manhood, and seemed to expire on the cross, and after three days to rise from the dead. Now as the man Jesus, and no other, was the Son which the Docetes and Cerinthians denied, the Docetes and Cerinthians denied the Son; and as God was the Father in respect to the Son, in no other way than in begetting the man Jesus, they denied the Father; and this was the spirit of antichrist, or the sort of doctrine antichrist was to teach" "The Theory of Prophecy", by Alfred Addis, B.A.

We trust this will be sufficient to show to any person of sense and impartiality that the Editor of the Christadelphian did not understand his subject, and that if he had understood it, and honestly handled it, he would have directed his hot anathemas, not to those who with the apostle abhor the doctrine of Docetian and Cerinthian antichrists, but "to the point."

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