

Why The Cross

In 1944 I was at a lecture given by a Christadelphian in the Midland Institute in the course of which an exposition of the Sacrifice of Christ was given which I considered to be false and unscriptural and dishonouring to God. Believing that a Christian is required to uphold and defend the Scripture as the inspired revelation of God and that to love and honour God is the first Commandment, I felt it my duty to challenge the speaker to defend his assertions in a debate.

For nearly twenty years as a Christadelphian I had thought that where Scriptures and truth were concerned Christadelphians feared no man, and you may imagine my amazement when my invitation was declined, not only by the speaker but also every other Christadelphian who was approached. In those days I was new to the so called clean flesh heresy, and there were many things I did not understand, but I felt the position was so unsatisfactory that I inserted a note in one of our pamphlets making the same challenge a general one, and I understand it is this which has led to the present meeting. I must also mention that I debated with a Christadelphian at Portsmouth in 1945 and we hoped to publish a record of what was said, but again you may judge of our astonishment when my opponent (whom I will not shame by naming) blankly refused to release to us the shorthand writer's report of the speeches. No doubt he realised the extent of his own admissions and blunders and the prospect of seeing them in print, appalled him ~ as well it might.

Since then no one has ventured and Mr Philip Hall, after trying by a very questionable stratagem to inveigle a Mr Southall of the Bereans into the fight, confessed that both J.C. and I.C. had been asked and declined and said he had never been so bitterly disappointed and humiliated in his life.

I ask you to believe that my purpose in making that original challenge and in agreeing to debate with Mr Barling is utterly impersonal and for the sake of truth alone. My sole wish is that truth may prevail. I have nothing to lose and everything to gain by the establishment of the truth. A victory or defeat in debate means nothing besides the truth. If Mr Barling can show that our view of the atonement is false I shall feel nothing but gratitude, because I believe with you that our eternal life depends upon a true knowledge of Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. On the other hand, it is my earnest prayer that if any of you begin to realise the true implications of the Christadelphian view you will let no consideration but truth weigh with you in deciding your course of action.

Most of the members of the Nazarene Fellowship were originally Christadelphians and we willingly and thankfully acknowledge our debt to what has been a stepping stone to fuller truth. Unfortunately, many people conclude from this that we are simply an offshoot of that body, composed of unusually cantankerous elements who have split off on a few minor matters of interpretation. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a wider gulf between the Nazarene Fellowship and Christadelphians than there is between the Christadelphians and the Roman Catholics for this reason: that the doctrine of Original Sin, which the Nazarene Fellowship rejects, is held by the Christadelphians in common with all other denominations of Christendom, including the Roman Catholics. That false doctrine of Sin-in-the-flesh enters into every phase of religion and colours and conditions not only doctrines but also behaviour and way of life. If well meaning Christians, whether Catholic or Christadelphian, did not believe they had the devil in their flesh they might be more successful in avoiding the works of the Devil,

Before I go on to outline our answer to the question "Why the Cross? I will indicate the very simple issues which are before us so that you may keep them in mind as we proceed:

1) Christadelphians teach that the Sacrifice of Christ was necessary for Himself. We deny it. We believe He died simply and solely for us.

2) They believe He was physically defiled by sin. We believe He was in every sense pure and undefiled.

3) They affirm that the reason He was the Son of God was to give Him the special strength necessary to overcome temptation. We believe it was in order to give Him the legal freedom necessary if He were to be our Saviour and Redeemer.

These issues are perfectly plain and straightforward, and while in the course of the debate we shall be led into involved arguments and fine distinctions, if you constantly come back to Christ and these simple questions there is nothing but what any ordinary person can easily understand. Robert Roberts once said one needed a prolonged Spiritual education before he can comprehend the Sacrifice of Christ. Don't believe it - it just is not

true. If you will have the courage to think for yourself and follow the pure stream right from its source you will be able not only to understand why Christ died but the message of Calvary will give you comfort and confidence and a real purpose and direction in your life.

Why did God choose to associate the Salvation of man with the tragedy of the Cross? Why is forgiveness of sin conditional upon the shedding of blood? I have affirmed, and I repeat it here, where Mr Barling has a full opportunity to refute it, that no Christadelphian can explain it or give a satisfactory reason. You will listen carefully, as I shall, for his explanation' The Christadelphian view is that the Cross is an example of vengeance for sin, a demonstration of God's displeasure and wrath against sinners, that it was a ritual exhibition of the destruction of sinful flesh. We believe that this view is terribly wrong and its implications so dishonouring to God that those who hold it will be disowned by Christ when He returns. If flesh is sinful God made it so: then why should He destroy it? If man is sinful by nature can he help being a sinner? Then how can a just God take vengeance upon him for being what he is? Above all, what diabolical injustice to inflict an awful death upon a sinless man because he had a sinful nature!

The Cross speaks not of vengeance for sin, but of redemption from sin; it tells not of punishment but of forgiveness. The key to the mystery is in John 3:16, "For God so loved..." On the authority of that text alone I would say that a theory which makes ritual destruction and punishment the motive behind our Saviour's Sacrifice is a wrong theory. It was love and love alone which led to Calvary. There will be punishment for the wicked, there will be a time of vengeance, but it is not yet. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live." When Jesus was baptised John said "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." The first question is, then, what is the sin of the world? Paul tells us "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin." We must therefore go back to that man by whom sin entered and decide what happened to him and how it affected his descendants. We have no need to speculate about Adam's nature. We are told that he was created from the dust, a living soul, of the earth, earthy, and dependant for his existence upon the natural processes of an animal organism. He was therefore corruptible, the only difference between man and the lower animals was in his endowment with mind, the powers of the intellect, reason and memory.

Now when Adam was placed under law and disobeyed God, what difference did it make to him? Did it change his nature? Did it implant an evil principle in his flesh which was not there before? There is no such suggestion anywhere in Scripture. Adam sinned with the very good nature of his creation, so why suppose that his flesh was changed to give him a bias towards sin? The change was in his relation to God, in his legal position. He came under condemnation; he incurred the sentence of death.

But, you may say, if Adam was corruptible, or capable of dying before he sinned, how could he incur death? Take, for example, the Chairman: he is corruptible and in the ordinary course of nature he will eventually die. At the moment he is not very troubled about it, although it is not a pleasant prospect, and it will come to him as it will come to all of us as surely as tomorrows' sun will rise.

But suppose he went out and shot a policeman and was sentenced to death, he would feel very much different about the prospect of death, and in fact he would be in a very different position. He would be legally a dead man, and if the law took its course in a few weeks he would pay the penalty and his life would be cut off in a highly unpleasant manner. Now: is that what happened to Adam? Not exactly.

God had said "in the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." He certainly incurred the penalty - but did he pay it? Did he die in the day he disobeyed? He certainly did not. He lived his natural life span of over 930 years. Was there implanted in his flesh a physical principle of decay which brought about that ultimate death? The Bible does not say so, and we do not believe it. Was his ultimate death the penalty? It was not for "Thou shalt surely die" means a judicial death. Was he forgiven? He was not: for there was no basis for forgiveness in the law of Eden. Adam was in a desperate position and he knew it. That is why he was afraid and hid himself.

But the love of God was equal to the situation. His wisdom found a way by which His just law could be met and upheld, and yet Adam be delivered, and in the process such a demonstration of love and mercy and self sacrifice as is unique in history. Do not forget if God loves us and does not wish us to perish. He also loved Adam and wished to save him.

Paul says, "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin." Yes, Adam brought into the world death as a penalty for sin, but if he had suffered the death he incurred that would have been the end of him and of the human race. If God had inflicted upon him the death he had incurred he would have been cut off, put to death

as a criminal there and then, and then you and I would never have had any existence; so that whatever the means by which Adam was saved from the wages of sin we owe our lives to it. It is perfectly true, as Paul says that death came by sin - and whose death was it? It should have been Adam's; he was the guilty one, but it was actually inflicted upon the animal with whose skin Adam was covered. That was the first sacrifice and the type of the Lamb of God who was to come, slain from the foundation of the world to take away the bondage of sin and death which bars the way to eternal life.

When Adam sinned he incurred death and legally he died. Scripturally he forfeited his life and became servant, or debtor, to sin. He had left the house wherein he was a Son and sold himself into slavery to a new master, and since he was no longer free, his life was no longer his own but pledged to sin, all his children to whom he transmitted that life were equally in bondage and slaves to sin; not necessarily sinners, but belonging to sin. This changed position is purely a legal matter involving alienation from God. Adam's nature was not changed, ours is not changed; it is still the same as when it was created, and we are today as capable of obedience, good and evil, as was Adam when he was first formed, but we are "sold under sin" because Adam forfeited his life and ours in his. This is what is meant by the declaration "God hath concluded all under sin" - not in order to punish all, but in order that He might have mercy on all.

Now, man, by his own action, having chosen to serve sin - thus becoming Sin's bondservant and earning the wages of sin - how could he be set free from his bondage and reconciled to God? Nothing he could do himself would help him; even perfect obedience from that day forward was utterly useless to effect his liberation. His life was forfeited to the law and only payment of the exact price would liquidate the debt. If he had paid it himself his life would have been taken and he would have perished. No child of Adam could redeem him by paying it for him because the life of every child of Adam was lost in his. No child of Adam could redeem himself let alone another. God alone could help Adam "when there was no man, no intercessor. His own arm brought salvation," or, as Job prophesied, "deliver him from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom." God came to the rescue by bringing His own Son into the world. The second Adam, and gave into His charge the task of delivering the human race from the bondage of sin and death. And this plan was carried out strictly and perfectly in accordance with the legal principles of ransom and redemption which had been so carefully laid down in the law of Israel.

In order to meet the necessities of the situation and to be in a position to carry out His Father's purpose, it was necessary first that Jesus should be of the same flesh and blood as Adam, that is why he was the seed of the woman. Then He had to be free from the condemnation which covers all descended from Adam, otherwise His own life would have been forfeit and He would have been in the same bondage as all others. This was the reason He was the Son of God. He received His life, like Adam, direct from the Source. The difference was that Adam was the created Son of God, while Jesus was the Begotten Son of God, related to Adam but not descended from him. Lastly, it was necessary that He should be put on trial, like Adam, and prove Himself perfect in character, for had He failed in His probation He would have lost His own life and would have been unable to help. So we have a parallel and a contrast. Adam lost his life by disobedience - and remember his life was the life of the race. Jesus kept His by obedience - and remember His life was His own, and that is why He was in a position to buy us back. That is how He was rich whereas we are poor. The Father had given Him to have life in Himself, that is how He was strong whereas we are weak. Who need ask the question, then, "Why the Cross?" "But whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister... for even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and give His life a ransom for many." What can we say of the perversity and the ingratitude which will turn round and tell our loving Saviour "Your life was a ransom for yourself." "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that we through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9), "For while we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6).

We think then of the lowly Jesus, reared by the holy mother in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, reading in the Jewish Scriptures the account of man's creation, how Adam came under condemnation, incurring a debt which therefore was still outstanding. Realising perhaps from hearing the doctors in the Temple and asking them questions the meanings and the limitations of the Sacrifices which He saw offered every year, and then learning from His mother the strange circumstances of His birth. He came at length to the knowledge that He was in a position to do what no other member of the human race could do - redeem His brethren by laying down His own life in payment of their debt.

Could He have sinned? Of course He could, for He was made in all points like us and tempted as we are. But had He sinned He would have failed. He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities and He learned obedience by the things that He suffered. How, then, did He overcome? By the exercise of His own will, the same power that God has given to every one of us, if we would exercise it, to resist temptation.

If you assume that because He was God's Son He was specially strengthened to overcome sin, you rob Him of all His honour. He may as well have been a puppet worked by strings. His victory over sin was His own - "Therefore I have set my face like a flint and I know I shall not be ashamed." The belief that the purpose of His birth was to endow Him with special power to resist sin is the most disastrous misconception of Scripture, for not only does it rob Christ of His honour and make God's ways unjust, but it leads to the entirely false conclusion that we are physically incapable of obedience. Further, it draws attention away from the true reason for the Virgin Birth, which was that His life came direct from God and not via the condemned channel, and puts in its place a fallacy which makes Christ's death nothing but a display of meaningless bloodshed.

Jesus, then, voluntarily and of His own free choice, determined to do His Father's will and take His place in the arrangement which was foretold and prefigured in Eden and again on Mount Moriah. He went voluntarily to the death of the Cross and gave up His life for the sake and in the stead of His brother Adam, a life for a life, the Just for the unjust, the innocent victim bearing the penalty of the guilty sinner.

Was it substitution? Of course it was. Do you reject it on that account? If so, you reject Salvation, for unless Christ died for you, you are yet in your sins. If, because you dread the false conception of substitution as the punishment of an innocent man instead of the guilty, you accept the view that Christ died for His own defiled nature. You are treading underfoot the blood of the Covenant and counting that wherewith you should be sanctified an unholy thing.

Was it unjust for Christ to bear our sins and die for us? It would have been unjust if He had been under compulsion - or under condemnation. But He was not. It was a case of paying that other Lord Sin the price for our release, and He voluntarily undertook His task for the joy that was set before Him. We are not so foolish as to believe that it would have served any good purpose for God to punish Jesus instead of us, nor would it have been right. But is not the Christadelphian view as bad or worse? Would it not have been unjust for God to require His death, an innocent sinless man, because He was human nature, a thing over which He had no control? It would be as unjust to inflict death upon a sinless man because he possessed a defiled nature as it would be to punish the innocent instead of the guilty.

But Calvary speaks not of punishment, but of love and forgiveness; not a simple act of remission, because that while showing, love would not have established the principles of justice and truth. It was a very carefully conceived plan of redemption, designed to excite the interest and the love and enlarge the minds of all succeeding generations of mankind, and if, as I believe Christadelphians have done, the true principles of ransom is lost, the Cross becomes an insoluble mystery, it loses its regenerative influence upon the mind and becomes a hindrance to our faith rather than the foundation of it.

We have no fear of the taunt of Substitution. We believe our Saviour died for us and we love Him for it. We believe that apart from the love of God in giving His own Son to be the Saviour of the world we would never have had life at all and therefore could never have received that life more abundant, which is the gift of God to those who love and honour Him. We believe that had we been put on probation like Adam we should have failed, but we know that we can only blame ourselves and confess that we are sinners because Jesus was tried just the same and He overcame. And we believe that had He chosen, or had His courage failed in the supreme moment. He could have claimed eternal life as His right, called to His aid more than twelve legions of angels and passed into eternity alone, leaving us and all mankind outside to perish as sinners deserve to perish. But how, then, should the Scriptures have been fulfilled: who would then have justified the forbearance of God in passing over the sins done afore-time in order that man might be saved? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, for the joy that was set before Him in bringing many sons unto glory. He did not flee in the face of evil. He gave His back to the smiter and hid not His face from shame and spitting. For Himself? - shameful thought! He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed.

To summarise - He found us like treasure hid in a field, and He went and sold all that He had and bought that field. The field is the world that God so loved. The treasure hid is whosoever will, that shall not perish, and the price that Jesus paid to buy that field was His own life.

We see the mercy of God when we see that He regards the first sin of Adam as the sin of the world, covering and including the many sins that we have committed, because we see that if our sins had not been covered by Adam's then we could not have been covered by the Sacrifice which redeemed him. This is the hidden wisdom of God, whereby one perfect offering has been sufficient to ransom a multitude whom no man can number. If we had been put individually upon probation requiring perfect obedience, then we failed we would each have perished or

else we should have required an individual Saviour, on the principle of life for life, eye for eye, blood for blood. The federal principle whereby all are legally included under the One Sin can also legally include all under the One righteous act which made atonement for that Sin. When we discover by the light which has come into the world that we are by nature in Adam and in bondage to sin and death, all we need to do is to accept what Jesus freely offers - a receipted bill, a passport back into the glorious freedom of the sons of God, which He has purchased for us with His own blood, thus, when we look toward the Cross and see Jesus hanging there, enduring the awful pains of a criminal execution, we can thankfully and lovingly say "He suffered that for us." He endured literally the suffering of that dreadful death which was justly due to rebels against God, so that we might not suffer it; so that we might not perish.

Because Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us, all that is required of us is that we signify our belief and acceptance of Him as our Saviour, by going through the symbol, in baptism; to signify that we have come out of the Adamic bondage of sin, that we have been bought by God and paid for with the precious blood of His beloved Son, and become adopted Sons in the house of our heavenly Father.

SUMMARY. Our view is that the Cross was not an act of retribution, it was not an example of punishment, its purpose was not the ritual destruction of sinful flesh, and it was emphatically not necessary for Jesus' own salvation. We reject utterly and completely the idea that human nature is essentially evil, or that sin is a fixed principle in the flesh, or even had it been so, that it would either be just, or serve any good purpose whatsoever to put to death a sinless man for no other reason than that He was possessed of such supposed sinful flesh.

It is our characters which are at fault, which require cleansing and perfecting, and the contemplation of the sufferings of Christ, with the revelation that He died there upon the Cross for us has a far higher regenerative power upon the mind than would the infliction of pain upon the body.

It is the effect upon the mind of man which caused God to choose the way He did. He could have punished Adam for his sin. He could have simply forgiven him. He could have prevented him from sinning, but had He taken any of these courses, where would have been displayed the supremacy of law, the beauty of justice, the depth of His mercy, or the wideness of His love?

Brother Ernest Brady.