

# **REDEMPTION**

## **A mangled metaphor**

“It is indeed a sad thing to see Christadelphians of to-day spending their strength to pull down good and sound work built up by the labour and study of Christadelphians of yesterday, and in their misguided efforts to defend errors destroying the very roots of the Truth. It is their own fault! They have rejected prophets who were sent to them! They have burned and suppressed books! Warned their followers against controversial reading; closed their eyes and ears rather than face the unpleasant fact that some at least of the things they have inherited are lies; have made the Word of God of non-effect by their traditions and have dishonoured the name of the Son of God. They should have remembered the words of Jesus: “Take heed therefore how ye hear; for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.” This is the only explanation I can see of the way in which Christadelphians are lately losing the understanding of truths which were regarded as fundamental a generation ago. Soon they will have nothing of any worth and will find themselves amongst the busy, prosperous people doing wonderful works to whom Jesus will say: “Depart from me, I never knew you.””

The foregoing was the concluding paragraph of a leaflet written in protest against an article in “The Christadelphian”, November 1952 by L.G.Sargent. It is severe but certainly not too severe as an indictment of Christadelphianism. The purpose of the article was to attempt to prove that the death of Christ is not to be regarded as a sacrifice made on behalf of others, as when one person pays a debt owed to another, or as when one person sacrifices his life to save the life of a loved one.

The Nazarene Fellowship hold the belief that Scripture emphatically and plainly teaches that Jesus voluntarily suffered the death incurred by sin in order that sinners might not have to suffer it. This view is abhorrent to Christadelphians; they label it “Substitution.” They say it is “too commercial;” they say it implies “punishing the innocent and letting the guilty go free.” It has been proved in our literature that none of these objections are real and they will be dealt with again briefly in the course of this article; but whether they like it or not, whether they accept it or reject it, the truth is as expressed by Peter: “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”

We do not believe that anyone ever has or ever can make this anything other than that Jesus died in our stead. We believe and accept it thankfully as the greatest demonstration of self-sacrificing love which the world has seen, and we can feel only pity for those who find themselves obliged to search for an alternative explanation.

The writings of Robert Roberts and the Statement of Faith which he drew up have committed the community to the belief that the condemnation of man in Eden changed human nature from the “very good” of Genesis 1:31, to the very bad “flesh full of sin” which it is now said to be. Their explanation of the death of Christ is that as a condition of forgiving men their sins, God required (in Robert Roberts’ words) “the ritual destruction of sinful human nature in a morally sinless bearer thereof.” How there could be a morally sinless bearer of the nature which is affirmed makes sinlessness in us an impossibility we shall never know, nor how it could serve the ends of mercy, justice or truth to require the ritual destruction, of one who succeeded in living sinlessly. The Christadelphian method of dealing with these and similar questions is to assume an air of profound reverence and tack together an assortment of texts, relating generally to other subjects, with a quotation or two from the Doctor or Robert Roberts. We never find an explanation in plain simple English because it would be seen to be too obviously outrageous. If as we suspect their inner minds are often more than a little uneasy, they conceal the fact and comfort themselves with verbiage.

The sacrifice of Christ is certainly the most important single event in the world’s history. It is equally certainly the vital fact and central theme of Scripture. A simple person reading the many references to it would unquestionably come to the conclusion that Jesus suffered death for sinners; in other words that He gave up His life for us. We have no doubt that one who holds that simple belief and is baptised into Christ in accordance with it is in the way of Salvation. But the sad thing is that such a position is impossible for a Christadelphian, because of the implications of other doctrines held. For example, believing that Jesus’ nature was defiled and unclean leads to the conclusion that His death was inevitable and therefore necessary for His own Salvation. Such belief is quite incompatible with His death being a voluntary sacrifice and in complete conflict with its purpose according to Scriptural evidence. Similarly the belief that natural death is the wages of sin destroys the present reality of Salvation, according to John 5:2-4, and John 15:31 etc., because believers still die, the same as unbelievers.

In the early part of his article on Redemption, L.G.Sargent admits that the primary meaning of the term “to redeem” means to buy back, but he affirms that to regard it as having that sense when used in connection with the death of Jesus “vitiates thinking.” We who were once Christadelphians know quite well why it is necessary for them at all costs to avoid any suspicion of there being anything in the nature of a payment in connection with Jesus’ sacrifice, but no one should know better than L.G.Sargent that a first principle of Bible Study is that its terms must be interpreted consistently and with due regard to their derivation and idiom.

If the principle of redemption in the Old Testament is correctly illustrated, as he admits it is, by the requirement of a literal payment of a half-shekel for every soul of Israel that was redeemed, then, since it is spoken of as for our redemption it is right to look for the same principle in Jesus’ death.

Surely if there is any vitiated thinking it emanates from the man who can produce an article with the object of proving that there is nothing in the nature of a commercial transaction in the principles upon which God speaks of Himself as our Redeemer. Have we been bought with a price? (1 Peter 1:18). Is the church purchased with His own Blood? He may not like the idea. He may not be able to see how the principles of a commercial transaction can have an appropriate place in the plan of Salvation but his brain must be addled to imagine he can make something else of these Scriptures.

The best and simplest explanation of the purpose of His death is that given by the Master Himself (Matthew 20:28): “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” The idea of ransom is not as familiar to us as it would be to ancient peoples but it can be understood and applied in accordance with well-established principles. Jesus’ words seem so clear and simple that it is difficult to imagine how any community can have bound itself by a Statement of Faith which affirms that his life was taken from Him because He was of sinful nature; that he was born under condemnation and therefore Himself included in the many for whom He died.

Yet such is the case, and L.G.Sargent feels himself under the obligation of explaining away what to any reasonable person is the simple and obvious meaning of Jesus’ words. Referring to the passage he says: “It is the act of giving which He (Jesus) emphasises.” Even if this fairly stated the case, we quite fail to see how it in any way helps the argument that Jesus’ death was not a sacrifice made solely on our behalf; for if He in any true sense gave His life, then it was impossible that He could have been as Christadelphians assert, under an obligation to do so. For could there have been any circumstances which made His death necessary on His own account. A man who pays a bill which he owes does not speak of giving something of his to benefit someone else; nor does a man who is justly under sentence of death claim to be suffering for his brother.

It is true that Jesus emphasises the fact of His giving, and well might He do so, for reason insists that if His life was forfeit for any cause whatsoever, then his death could not have been a sacrifice. But He does very much more than this. He not only says “The Son of man came to give His life,” but He tells us why He gave it; He gave it as a ransom.

If, as L.G.Sargent says, Jesus was only concerned with emphasising that His life was given. He had already said so; what purpose was served by Him adding the explanation that He gave it as a ransom? This word ransom, like redemption, has a clear and precise meaning, and its use by Jesus in relation to His sacrifice shows the complete failure of Sargent’s argument and presents Christadelphians with another problem which they cannot solve.

The word in the original is “*lutron*,” a price; redeem in the original is “*agorazo*,” to acquire at the forum or in the market by purchase; thus a ransom is a price paid over for the redemption or a purchase back of something which has become alienated from its original owner. Its application to the sacrifice of Christ is appropriate for very good reasons which will be explained. God has based man’s Salvation upon the principle of purchase and not of unconditional forgiveness of sins. That is why our faith must be based, not upon baptism as a washing, and a woolly hope that we may scrape through the day of judgment, but upon the knowledge that we belong to Christ now because He has bought us with His own blood, and for that reason, even though we shall be unworthy, we shall be in no wise cast out.

Man originally belonged to God but by disobedience became the bondservant of sin, earning sin’s wages, death, as a debt owing. But Jesus, not a servant of sin, paid the debt Himself and thus secured man’s deliverance. The objection, often made and echoed by L.G.Sargent that in this case there is no one to whom the price is literally paid is a mere quibble and if people are foolish enough to be misled by such will-o’-the-wisp into rejecting the real purpose and meaning of Jesus’ death they deserve little sympathy. If a man breaks the law and

has to pay a fine, no actual person benefits; the money goes to satisfy the claim of law personified in the State. If a man has to do six months hard labour, no one benefits from his imprisonment, but no one would be so foolish as to deny that he had paid his penalty simply because no one had received the price!

In the series of articles "Redemption in Christ," W.F.Barling made much of this point, and because we spoke of personification of sin (as does the Apostle Paul) and referred to Jesus' death as the payment of our debt, he went so far as to charge us with belief in a personal devil.

We pointed out that our view was in perfect accord with "Eureka," but Barling disclaimed Dr. Thomas' teaching and implied that it was no longer accepted as authoritative. It was therefore rather a surprise when we came across a pamphlet by the late C.C.Walker called "A Ransom for All" which was printed as recently as 1920, and which quoted verbatim from "Eureka" Vol. 1 page 20 as follows:-

"Paul reminds the saints in Rome that they were all the servants of sin once; but thanks God on their behalf that they had been free from sin and were now the servants of righteousness, having obeyed from the heart a form of teaching, into which they were delivered (Rom. 6:17). They obeyed a form of teaching which emancipated, liberated, or set them free from the Lordship of Sin." \*(see end note). This was Paul's mission, to invite people to a change of masters. He addressed himself to free men and slaves, all of whom, whatever their political or social position, were in bondage to the Devil or Sin... He invited sin's servants to become Jehovah's servants upon the principle of purchase, so that he says: "Ye are bought with a price." Redemption is release for a ransom. All who become God's servants are therefore released from a former lord by purchase. The Purchaser is Jehovah; the price paid or ransom paid the precious blood of the flesh through which the Anointing Spirit was manifested... Satan took the price of release. (Note that - Author). In the day of His power He valued the blood at thirty pieces of silver... He nevertheless laid down His life to purchase their release from the bondage of Sin and Death."

This passage might well form the spear-head of our attack against Christadelphians; we accept every word it says and believe it to be sound and Scriptural. But the aim and intention of Sargent's article is directly opposed to it, as is the substance of what Carter says on Baptism, and what Norris says on Sacrifice which will be dealt with in a later article. Let the reader remember, it comes from "Eureka", and was re-quoted by C.C.Walker in 1920. Is Christadelphianism a new apostasy, or not?

We return now to those words of Jesus which Sargent suggests were "intended to emphasise the fact of giving." Jesus not only tells us that He came to give His life; and that He gave it as a ransom; He says a thing which is even more conclusive and destructive of the Christadelphian doctrine. He says He came to give His life a ransom for many.

Christadelphian writers have long sought to escape the force of these words - they would perhaps have been wiser to treat them as L.G.Sargent does - turn his face away and whistle and act as if they did not exist. The usual thing is to say they mean "on behalf" or "as a representative." But if Jesus so intended He would have used the common word "*Huper*," which means "for" in this sense. The word he actually used was "anti," meaning "in place of", or "in stead of." This can be verified from a concordance and is conclusively proved by its use in other places. In Matthew 5:28 we have "An eye for (anti) an eye (i.e. one eye in place of another) and a tooth for (anti - in place of) a tooth." The same word is used in "a ransom for (anti - in place of) many." It is also used in Matthew 2:22 and here, where the context plainly proves that one person did actually take the place of another it is correctly translated "Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of (anti) his father Herod."

If we accept Jesus' words instead of nullifying or ignoring them for the sake of a false theory, there is clearly no escape from the fact that our Salvation was accomplished on the principle of the payment by God, with the willing acquiescence of Jesus Himself, of the life of one who belonged to Him, as the price of liberation of a family of people in bondage to sin. And why indeed should anyone wish to escape that glorious fact, unless it be that to admit its truth would be to expose a tissue of lies which has been elaborated for over a century? To object that it is too commercial is to object to the very feature which has been designed by a just and merciful God to assure us of its reality.

We will willingly admit that the plan of Salvation is infinitely more than a commercial transaction; indeed there are no words which will adequately express the infinity of love which lies behind God's gift of His Son and Jesus' unfaltering obedience; but it is the knowledge that at the base of the whole scheme is the unassailable rock fact; that our redemption rests not upon a problematical question of whether or not our sins will be forgiven, but upon a legal, irreversible covenant of purchase, sealed and delivered with blood, that is the true and only effective foundation of our faith. This is the pearl of truth which at one time of day was well understood and accepted by

Christadelphians, but today it is lost to them and their conception of the reality of present Salvation destroyed by the belief that Adamic condemnation lasts till death - and beyond.

The foolishness of some kind of advocacy has been described as “throwing the baby away with the bath water”, by their almost pathological insistence that sin is an implantation of a law of decay which “makes men physically obnoxious to God,” Christadelphians have thrown out the baby and kept the dirty water.

Our confession of faith is that Christ died for us. That is He died the death due to sinners so that we should not die that death. Thus, though this needs qualifying, we may truly say He died in our stead. One either believes this or believes nothing, for there is certainly no alternative compatible with Scripture. If one labels the view “Substitution”, either unwilling or unable to see how it could be possible for Jesus to die for us, and so rejects it, then it is inexplicable - there is nothing left.

If one is incapable of distinguishing between (a) Jesus voluntarily laying down His life in conformity with His Father’s purpose and (b) God inflicting the punishment of the guilty upon the innocent, he is not to be blamed. But where is there anyone so mentally paralysed?

In our view it would take a considerably greater exercise of perception to distinguish between Jesus as a representative, which Christadelphians profess to accept, and Jesus as a substitute which they profess to reject. We have never yet met one who could do so and perhaps if one of the gentlemen whose works we have been dealing with made the attempt it might help to open his eyes.

Towards the end of the article L.G.Sargent shows his hand and we see at last the real purpose of his attempt to get rid of the real meaning of redemption. He says (p.330) we can “equate redemption with forgiveness.” Nothing is further from the truth. Can we imagine an Israelite being delivered from Egypt if he had not sprinkled the blood upon the doorposts of his house? Or a lawbreaker coming to the Altar without the appropriate offering being forgiven? Like John Carter he was desperately anxious to prove that our Saviour’s death was not in any sense a payment or satisfaction and accomplished for us nothing beyond the creation in us of a state of mind conducive to our sins being remitted, because this is the present belief of Christadelphians, and he has gone to the length of throwing overboard practically everything which the C.D. has to teach us concerning our Salvation.

Forgiveness is not and cannot be the same as redemption; these can no more be equated than can birth and inheritance. Forgiveness is a pure act of grace, with or without conditions, whereas redemption is loosing for a price, or freedom by purchase and until a man has been the subject of redemption he cannot be the recipient of forgiveness.

If Mr. Sargent had allowed the history of God’s acts of redemption in the past (his own words) to speak for themselves, he would have found that, so far from our giving them a legal twist they are everyone based upon law and are in fact all legal transactions designed for the express purpose of establishing in the circumstances of Christ’s death the very principle he is seeking to overthrow.

The Scripture teaching is that in spite of our unworthiness, we can be saved on condition that we recognise that Jesus’ death was the price of our redemption, the means of our liberation from a bondage to death. Redemption therefore must precede any possibility of forgiveness; and if when we are baptised we do not realise that what Jesus suffered on the Cross about nineteen hundred years ago was the literal price of our purchase by God for Himself, we may be very sorry for our sins but we shall not be saved. “God commended His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.”

It is our sad conviction that L.G.Sargent and those Christadelphians who deny the reality of and the need for such redemption, or who seek to remove or alter its meaning are denying themselves the benefit of the free grace of God.

To recognise the imputation of Adam’s sin is vital to salvation; but it is not imputed into the blood, or the flesh, it is purely a legal matter. No one need suffer it - not even Adam; but we have to learn that it is the means whereby God has elected to bring about Salvation, not of works but of grace.

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