

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 138

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Editorial

Dear Brethren and Sisters and Friends, Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

This Circular Letter sees the last of the extracts from the book "The Devil and Hell of the Bible" published by the Megiddo Church which has been greatly appreciated by our readers and has also provoked some thoughtful responses as reported in the "Chat Section" from time to time.

There is insufficient material for a "Chat Section" in this issue for Sister Evelyn Linggood has been the only one to comment upon recent topics. She writes;

"With regard to Hebrews 6:18 the two immutable (unchangeable) things are evidently God's promises to mankind and their fulfilment in Christ; these things are sure and steadfast and constitute our faith and hope."

Regarding the use of the word 'Redemption' Sister Evelyn writes;

"The idea of universal salvation is of course scripturally untenable, Adam's redemption made it possible that his progeny would have natural life but eternal life is a gift obtained only through faith and obedience - we have to know God and Jesus Christ His Son, and by His sacrifice have been bought back from Sin but still have to await the redemption of the body, so redemption is seen as two-fold as can be understood in the Epistle to the Ephesians (1:13,14), "until the redemption of the purchased possession." We are now redeemed from Sin but in hope await immortality."

Referring to the "Jesus said...." article (No. 22) Sister Evelyn writes;

"The explanation of the 'Serpent' is much better than some but it does seem that there was a literal serpent in the enactments in Eden and we know that subtlety characterises its ways as it does in measure other beasts of the field such as the fox etc., and we are told in Genesis 2:19 that God formed every beast of the field and this includes the serpent and it seems to me that if we take the man and woman and the two trees to be literal the serpent should be too, and probably because its actions played a part in the temptation of Eve it became a symbol of Sin. Perhaps we may have other people's thoughts on this matter."

In reply to Sister Evelyn's last comments it seems to me that there are still one or two points that have not yet been mentioned, for apart from the 'Serpent' being more subtle than any creature of God's making, it was able to reason of right and wrong - an ability which was given only to man. It may also be said that subtlety is a characteristic of every creature that has to out-wit its prey in order to feed, or outwit its

predator in order to survive, but we are told in Genesis 3:1 that the 'Serpent' was more subtle than these. Surely this can only apply to mankind with its abysmal history of cruelty never matched by any other creatures - the result of man's will when opposed to God's.

Sister Audrey Bundy sends her Love and Best Wishes to all the Brethren and Sisters.

"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all of them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Ephesians 6:23).

Russell Gregory.

A commentary on a booklet entitled

"The Cross of Christ - Bible Teaching about Redemption"

(Author: Peter Watkins)

The booklet bearing the above title was sent to an experienced student and reader of the Bible and was passed on to me for my comments on its claim to endorse Bible teaching about Redemption through the sacrificial death of Christ.

As a matter of fact, having known the late Peter Watkins and the Christadelphian community's doctrine he taught and defended, I know that their theory of the meaning of the death of Christ does not accept it as a sacrifice. It is as well therefore to know with whom we are dealing, both with the author and the views and teaching of the community to whom he owes his allegiance on the basis of its Statement of Faith or creed, and not necessarily Bible truth.

It is not that I am not qualified to judge their doctrinal position; I have known and examined it for the past 57 years and exposed the many errors and contradictions of their leaders and writers, and many have come to this realisation, but have kept silent, resigned, or have been disfellowshipped.

Many readers of this booklet who are not aware of the author's indoctrination and obsession against human nature being as God made it in the beginning, would think most of what he says to be quite plausible and acceptable, not realising the underlying false premises upon which he is basing this very important subject.

He commences with a description of crucifixion by stating:

"In reality it was a stark and hideous spectacle. Crucifixion must surely be one of the most monstrous of all human inventions. Scourging sometimes preceded crucifixion. Next the victim was nailed through the hands and feet to a wooden cross which was then lifted to a vertical position and fixed firmly in the ground. Then he was simply left to die."

I agree that this was a stark and hideous spectacle to behold, but more so with a man who was begotten of God and had maintained His right to life as a Son of God and remained sinless but Peter Watkins says;

"It was such a shameful death that some contended that Jesus could not have been the Son of God because God would never have allowed His Son to die such a vile death."

There is a certain amount of truth in this reasoning because under any other circumstances except for His being a willing and Redemptive Sacrifice for the world God would never have allowed the inflicted death by blood-shedding of His Son who was without sin in all respects; albeit He could have died by reason of His corruptible nature if left to Himself without a change to an incorruptible nature. But how then

could He die the judicial death due to Adam's transgression - the death by sin which Paul teaches in Romans chapter 5 and which has nothing to do with the common death of the natural creation, animal and human?

The idea of the common natural death of a 'living soul' being the sentence passed on Adam for his sin is contrary to the teaching of the Bible, and with such a false conception it is impossible for Peter Watkins to give a true meaning of the death of Christ as a Redemptive sacrifice. In fact with his predecessors and some of his contemporaries, he teaches that the flesh of all men including Jesus became infected with sin and a tendency toward sin because God changed it from what it was at creation because of Adam's transgression - the flesh from then on being obnoxious to God. No paradox equal to this can be found other than in Christadelphian teaching and literature. See Clause V of their Statement of Faith.

Adam sinned while in the very good nature as a living soul, there was no need for God to increase his ability to sin by introducing a physical and compulsive element into the flesh to make it or style it as "sinful-flesh," nor was there any need to change the nature to cause decay and death, the latter was already a fact of his nature at creation; Peter Watkins quotes this on Page 5 yet Clause V nullifies it by forcing acceptance of a nature not found in the Bible, an imaginary nature that not even the Apostle Paul had any knowledge of. But in the course of writing this booklet he supports another nature foreign to Bible teaching, a nature which was accepted by the Apostate Church of Rome through Constantine; the doctrine of sin-in-the-flesh or a compulsive bias to sin in human nature whereby it becomes synonymous of sin. Yet Peter Watkins is teaching that Jesus had nothing in common with the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, a motley crowd who conspired to put Him to death, and he declares,

"What a shocking commentary on human nature, for all this type of people were against the righteous principles and teaching of the Son of God."

I marvel at this, seeing that he accepts that a compulsive element and bias to sin was in their nature.

Why does Peter Watkins continually confuse human character under law with the physical human nature under physical law? Because he is committed to this false conception through the indoctrination of Robert Roberts and his successors, yet Christ was of the same human nature to which he refers his "shocking commentary."

He goes on to say,

"Human beings just cannot tolerate a person whose one ambition in life is to obey the laws of God - human beings reject the standards required by God. They prefer to obey their own human instincts..."

He then goes on to quote the words expressed by Jesus who was a human being, a man tempted in all points as we are, yet because unlike Peter Watkins, He knew that as human beings we are as God made Adam from the beginning. He was justified in condemning men's unlawful practices and speaks of them in Mark 7:21-23. Peter Watkins fails to quote what Jesus said also about human nature in Matthew 12:35, "A good man out of the good treasures of the heart bringeth forth good things," he is only concerned with the concept that human nature is sin, and in doing so he convicts Christ, who was definitely of human nature but not of human begettal of the will of the flesh. It was not human nature that Jesus was condemning but sin or rightfully and scripturally stated transgression of law. If sin were an element of the physical flesh it would mean that sin was continuous transgression and unavoidable - it should also have affected Jesus who was without sin. You should see the danger to which such errors can lead with such a false and negative attitude towards human nature, in fact because Jesus was human nature it is said that He was 'sin' through His birth of Mary and in quoting 2 Corinthians 5:21 the statement of Paul is misapplied to teach that Jesus was "sin-nature" or as I have heard some say, "Serpent-Nature," whereas Paul was not referring to the birth of Jesus but to His death. The latter part of verse 20 gives the reason why people should be, and need to be reconciled to God - "for He hath made him to be a "sin-offering for us (not for Himself), that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." See Isaiah 53 as proof of this.

There is quite a difference in quoting from the Bible and expounding the true meaning of what is quoted. Peter Watkins is very much at fault on this matter where on page 6 speaking of the Tragedy of Eden he confuses the Judicial inflicted death Adam merited by sin (Romans 5:12) , with his already corruptible nature which left to itself without a spirit change would inevitably have succumbed to death and a return to dust - "for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shall return;" this was the result or consequence of losing his rights as a son of God with all that it involved and which made Adam a figure of the last Adam who was to come, the letter to Hebrews chapter 5 verses 5 to 10 confirming David's Psalm 8:4 reference to Adam but enlarging upon it in reference to Christ and His death upon the cross, which was not a penalty due to Himself but allowed by the Grace of God for all,

In quoting Romans 5:12 Peter Watkins is making Paul's legal terms to apply to the physical, yet he and his predecessors have agreed that Adam was made a living soul subject to death if not changed to spirit nature, so that the death Adam experienced at 930 years was not by sin, but by reason of his corruptible nature being allowed to take its course. The taking away of his life in the blood in the day he sinned was the penalty Adam merited by sin, but in the mercy of God was spared through Jesus the Lamb of God typified in Eden as slain from the foundation of the world. This is the death Paul speaks of in Romans 5 and which Jesus teaches in John 5:24,25 in the present tense and must refer to the legal and moral position not the physical; see also 1 John 3:14 "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." What death? Not the common death surely for all in-Christ are still capable of the common death which Peter Watkins says is the penalty for sin. See also Gal. 2:20; Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:10-14; 3:1-10.

Peter Watkins says:

"Like begets like. Adam disobeyed and became a sinner, and all his children follow him in the way of sin."

This is not true. It cannot be said of righteous Abel, nor of Seth, nor of Enoch who walked with God and had this testimony that he pleased God, nor of Noah of whom God said "Thee only have I found righteous in this generation." There are many more, like Abraham for example.

Peter Watkins uses phrases such as:

"Adam's sin-stricken race:" "All who are in Adam, to use a scriptural expression - are likewise subject to death:" "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

Here again he is wresting Scripture out of context. It was not natural death that passed upon Adam but judicial death from which he was redeemed, so that all in his loins would never have existed but for the provisional substitute-animal slain at the time. All in his loins are imputed to have sinned as members of Adam's body but they are not convicted as actual sinners because they were not even born. This applies also in the case of Romans 3:23 for all had not sinned when Paul wrote this, but it is explained more fully in Galatians 3:22, "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

To be concluded under sin and to be an actual sinner are two different things, this is what Paul is endeavouring to show, and to reveal the Love and Mercy of God and also His justice; not the injustice that appears if we are to accept Peter Watkins' view that all men are condemned to death for Adam's sin before they have even been born or had even committed sin personally.

Under the heading "Sin and Death" Peter Watkins treats Romans 5:12 as relating to natural death to which all creation is subject - not because of sin but by the creation of God, it has no relation to sin and death by violation of God's law, and where he quotes "the wages of sin is death," this is what Paul refers to as wages received from Sin personified as a master, for services rendered to him as slaves in his bond- age - sold under Sin by Adam.

If we become servants of God by Redemption or release by Ransom from this bondage we become free from sin and death, but our physical corruptible nature remains the same and we are still subject to

natural death, yet we are said to have died unto sin when baptised into the death of Christ which, please note, was not by natural decay, but an inflicted death by the shedding of blood.

Peter Watkins goes on to say,

“Adam broke God’s law and paid the penalty,”

If this were true, and this same death passed upon all men in this literal and physical manner, then all men in like manner pay their own penalty for a sin they were never guilty of. What an injustice! How can God Redeem and forgive and yet exact a full penalty? This is not Bible teaching about Redemption, but a God dishonouring doctrine of men void of the Spirit’s teaching. The fact is that neither Adam nor his descendants, pay the penalty Adam incurred; Jesus paid it for all, but this does not mean all are saved from the legal sentence of death hanging over them by imputation; but they can be saved by being enlightened to this alienation and bondage, and come out of the ‘in-Adam’ position into Christ, so passing now from death unto life. Physically, impossible now, but not in the way Jesus and His Apostles taught it.

Why was Jesus crucified? Peter Watkins says that it was because the Jews hated Him and wanted to get rid of Him. He says that this was one obvious reason, but surely God could have stopped them committing this terrible crime. I marvel that he sees it as a terrible crime in view of his acceptance of Clause XII of their Statement of Faith which states, “Jesus was put to death by the Jews and Romans, who were however, but instruments in the hands of God, for the doing of that which He had determined before to be done - viz, the condemnation of sin in -the flesh, through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all, as a propitiation to declare the righteousness of God, as a basis for the remission of sins.” Here we have a terrible crime through the instrumentation of God working in evil men to cause the death of His sinless Son to declare His righteousness and this criminal act as a basis upon which He forgives sin. Does it not declare God’s unrighteousness as a perpetrator, of such a crime? How degraded in mind can people get when obsessed with the false doctrine of sin in the flesh, including that of Jesus.

This fact is further proved in Clause VIII in stating of Jesus, “He was raised up in the condemned line of Abraham and David, and who though wearing their condemned nature was to obtain a title to resurrection by perfect obedience, and by dying, abrogate the law of condemnation for himself and ail who should believe and obey him.” This is putting the cart before the horse, in other words reversing the process of redemption and reconciliation to God. It shows Christ to be alienated from God and condemned, yet obtaining in an alienated and condemned position a title to resurrection before death, and by a death due to His condemned position by law, abrogate that law by suffering its penalty. What a paradox; what an exposition of the reason Christ died! It is undoubtedly shared by Peter Watkins as he implies in his reference to the Brazen Serpent later on - that Christ had a serpent-nature, but first he speaks of the procession who followed Adam, but of course this must refer to Adam when he sinned not to his conduct after ejection from Eden for there is no record other than his living 930 years, his begetting of sons and daughters, and dying.

Peter Watkins says of these followers of Adam that

“When death looms large before them they start dragging their feet, but all to no avail. Although they are not willing to die, death claims them. The Lord Jesus was different. He always resisted sin, and accepted death. Thus he declared by his life and his death that Adam was wrong and God was right. To accept death as a just reward of ones sins is exceptional. But to accept death without ever having sinned marks out the Lord Jesus as a unique person.”

I say Amen to that, but what of Peter Watkins’ idea that Jesus had to die because He was human nature? Who but a follower of Robert Roberts, A.D.Norris, and W.F. Barling would have the gall to say there was no injustice in the death of Jesus?

Jesus was not facing the natural death other people he speaks of, were dreading? He was facing the stark reality of the cross and prayed to His Father that if it were possible, to be delivered from it, but He also knew that this was the important mission He had been appointed to fulfil - the giving of His life as the

Ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Were it not for this His Father would have prevented His death by the Jews and Romans for there was no cause of death in Him, the Jews could find none neither could Pilate, but of course Robert Roberts and Co were not there at the time to explain it to them, the cause being, as they teach. His condemned human nature.

How can condemned human nature be a 'Sacrifice'? How can one whose life is under pledge or forfeit to the law, give that life as a 'Ransom' to release others in the same hopeless position? Peter Watkins and Co have seen this difficulty, and instead of recognising that Christ died the death Adam had incurred by sin, they invented the theory of Christ being a representative and His death a mere martyrdom that by this righteousness unto death, God accepts it as a substitute for our failure, and as a basis for all His forgiveness.

Later on Peter Watkins goes on to say that Baptism is the equivalent of sharing Christ's death, but first he stresses the fact that Jesus was of our nature; I accept this and the quotations he refers to in the Bible, but I disagree with him where he says,

"Jesus by resisting sin and accepting death."

This phraseology is not correct; Jesus resisted temptation to sin all His life, but He was not compelled to accept death. He voluntarily offered Himself to God as the Ransom Price for Adam and all in him on the Federal Principle, His death was in the place of Adam's, and it was Substitutionary for the death Adam did not experience.

Baptism of a believer into Christ's death is not the same as experiencing and suffering the physical pain Jesus did, it is symbolic and substitutionary for the physical taking away of life, as with the animal sacrifice under the Law of Moses, the offerer did not experience death but recognised it as the penalty for the sinner, and God accepted it as a substitute for the time then present, but His own Son, as the fulfilment of the animal type.

I only wish that Peter Watkins had understood and accepted what he quotes from Romans 6:1-6, but knowing as I do, that he believed sin to be a physical element in the flesh, it makes Paul's explanation of the meaning of Baptism a mockery for the same flesh that goes into the water returns to the surface, the old-man of physical "sin-in-the-flesh" or "condemned-nature" which he believes in, is not crucified with Christ, the body of sin he and his community believe in, is not destroyed, he still believes that he and his community though having been immersed in water are still dragging their sinful-flesh feet toward natural death which they believe awaits them as the penalty for their condemned nature. How can he say, he or they have changed sides when they are still in Adam? How have they died unto sin if it is still in their flesh?

The truth is that sin was never in the physical flesh, neither did God condemn Adam's flesh. He condemned Adam's sin, his flesh was as God created it. Adam could not have sinned without law, and transgression relates to law and character, not physical flesh. When a person dies unto Sin personified as a Master the Master has no more claim, for the person has ceased to exist, having died with Christ and has become a new creature, a servant of God and His Son. The responsibility is to God from then on and he that despises the Spirit of Grace that has made him a servant is now facing the 'Second Death' having died in Baptism, symbolically, the first judicial death that came by Adam, but suffered by Jesus willingly, in his place and all imputed in him.

Hebrews 10:26-31 explains this and the condemnation of those who tread under foot the Son of God and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, thus despising the Spirit of Grace. Did not the angel state to Mary that the flesh and blood baby would be a Holy Thing called the Son of God? Why then has Peter Watkins and his predecessors judged the nature of Jesus as unholy and unclean and must be put to death as a declaration of what was due to this nature and for His own redemption and cleansing?

Peter Watkins goes on to state that the world that is within us is also called 'the flesh*' and has to be crucified, then he quotes Galatians 5:24 where Paul says "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

He then contradicts Paul by stating:

“Disciples must therefore prepare for confrontation with the world on two fronts. They have to crucify, or destroy their ungodly tendencies,”

but this is what Paul says they that are Christ’s have done already. This is therefore proof that Peter Watkins and his supporters do not consider they are Christ’s and have crucified the flesh and its affections and lusts - they still have these ungodly tendencies and baptism has profited them nothing, not having been born again of incorruptible seed by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Peter 1:23). In order to prove the case, Paul’s words in part of Romans 7 are used and wrested out of context to make it appear that Paul knew not how to conduct himself as a Christian even though converted to Christ and Baptised into His death. Many have recognised that Paul was either personating a Jew under the Law of Moses or referring to himself in his previous unconverted state as an un-regenerated Jew, for it is quite evident that Paul was no longer in a wretched state but could do all things through Christ.

We know this to be true, for Paul was one of the greatest examples of faith and followers of Christ, and therefore in this regenerated state he could not say of himself “How to do that which is good I find not;” he was the Apostle who said “Be ye followers of me even as I am of Christ.” It is most shocking therefore to read an extract from the Christadelphian Magazine 1947 a statement by Peter Watkins which reads:

“Sin is a product of Adamic flesh, and sin after baptism indicates a revival of the Adamic nature which we purported to destroy at Baptism. Yet if we are still members of the body of Christ we are still without sin, for “In Him is no sin.” If we are truly in Christ, it is not we that have sinned, but it is the irrepressible Adamic nature which we have been striving to mortify that has obtruded itself - and we heartily deplore the fact. As long as we deplore our transgressions - as long as they are committed despite ourselves and not because of ourselves - we remain in Christ and are righteous.”

What a statement following what he says in this booklet about those who have to crucify, or destroy their ungodly tendencies!

“It is not we that have sinned, it is the irrepressible Adamic nature.” “As long as our sins are committed despite ourselves, we are still righteous.” “Even though we commit sin, we remain in Christ, and righteous.”

Now we can see what Peter Watkins believes to be ‘Substitution’ - Jesus has lived as a righteous, sinless man, a martyr to His cause, accepting death on the Cross to destroy sin in His flesh which was obnoxious to God (Clause VIII B.A.S.F), and God accepts His righteous conduct as the ‘Substitute’ for their sin of which the irrepressible Adamic nature was responsible and which they were committing despite the fact that Jesus had proved it was possible not to commit sin in the same nature or flesh.

Did those Israelites in covenant relationship with God who in the wilderness were bitten by the fiery serpents God sent among them as condemnation of their sin, say “It is not we that have sinned but the irrepressible Adamic nature has obtruded itself”? No, God showed His displeasure because they were capable of obedience and no more biased to sin than Adam was at creation. It is Peter Watkins and his predecessors who have instituted this false theory as a legacy from the Apostate Church of Rome.

In dealing with the circumstances of the brazen serpent Moses had lifted on a pole we see the lesson clearly that the serpents were instruments of God in the punishment of those who violated His commands and brought death upon themselves. Peter Watkins fails to appreciate that they were already corruptible and would eventually die in any case apart from law, and that this was so with Adam under law and capable of natural death. Therefore when a sinning Israelite bitten by a serpent looked toward its brazen image, this signified faith in the word of God and he was saved from inflicted death as per law, even as Adam was, for in fact both would die natural deaths without modifications to their nature as living souls of the dust. Therefore Jesus could truly say, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son .of

man be lifted up.” Why? That all who look to Him in faith and understanding of the reason for His crucifixion and shed blood might have a life from under the death by imputation hanging legally over them on the federal principle taught by Paul in Romans 5.

When Peter Watkins says, “Although Christ died for us He did not die instead of us,” he is making a mockery of the Atoning work of Christ and of Baptism especially when he says,

“Christ’s followers have to die with him; this is the meaning of Baptism.”

Certainly it is, but it is into His Sacrificial death we are baptised, not into a natural death which all creation is subject to by physical law at creation.

Peter Watkins continues

“When God pronounced the death sentence on mankind in Eden, He was upholding His own righteous law, if He were to waive this sentence; He would in effect be saying that sin does not really matter after all. So the sentence stands and God requires that each of us must die.”

It seems then according to Peter Watkins, Jesus was wasting His breath when He said of Himself, “This is the bread which came down from heaven that a man may eat thereof and not die” (John 6:50,51).

Peter Watkins is off the scene and cannot come to an understanding of what death a believer has passed from unto life, but those responsible for sending out this booklet should examine themselves whether they be in The Faith and prove their own selves before trying to convert others to a basis of faith compiled of Clauses they have never read with understanding and therefore cannot explain. The false premises and teaching has all revolved around the confusing of natural death with inflicted judicial death for committed sin. There is a parallel in Ezekiel 18 of this very lesson - Adam, a son of God under law - and Israel in covenant relationship. Both are corruptible. We read in verse 17 that if an Israelite does what God has commanded, he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. It continues in verse 20 “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” The language here is concerning inflicted judicial death for sin under law and is plain enough to understand. Natural death is a foregone conclusion for righteous and wicked, but verse 21 states, “If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed - he shall surely live, he shall not die,” but it is obvious that this same person would die the common death of all human beings. Read how many times the phrase is used, “He shall not die,” and how it is used as pertaining to the death sentence of the Law and not to natural death. Therefore verse 20 has been corrupted and used out of context to prove the error that God changed Adam’s nature when he sinned and that previous to sin he was not of a decaying nature subject to death, and would not have died if he had not sinned. Yet it is used to disprove belief in the immortality of the soul, and to draw attention to Adam as a corruptible living soul at creation.

Peter Watkins accepts Paul’s teaching that men are justified freely by God’s grace through the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus, but he nullifies it by insisting that we all contribute and share it. How then can it be free justification? How can it be said that “In due time Christ died for the ungodly”? Where in Scripture does it say He died for Himself? It says in Daniel 9:26 that Messiah would be cut off, but not for Himself and Isaiah explains the reason in his 53rd chapter and it says nothing about dying for Himself.

Peter Watkins insists that though he and others have died symbolically by crucifixion with Christ’s real death for all, yet it has profited nothing and he states,

“So the sentence of Eden stands and God requires that each of us must die. God has not waived the death sentence.”

In effect then he believes that Christ died in vain. This is not Bible teaching about Redemption but his own erroneous concept received by the precepts of men.

I am appalled that a man of his so-called intelligence should use the incident of the Brazen Serpent as being a dramatised parable demonstrating that there was no power in the Law of Moses to save humanity from the serpent bite of sin. In fact there was power in the word of God to Moses to save people from the results of the serpent bites and these serpent bites were not sin - they were imposed by God to condemn sin. Jesus by His own sinless conduct also condemned sin in the very likeness of the very-good nature in which Adam sinned. Peter Watkins opposes this fact and is incorrect when he poses the question,

“Why does the Lord compare himself to a serpent of all creatures?”

He doesn't. He compares Himself in His coming death on the tree, to the lifting up of the Brazen Serpent Moses exhibited for faith and deliverance from inflicted death for sin.

It is a lie to say that Jesus inherited from Adam a 'Serpent' nature - which could be tempted to sin, and this nature was the cause of the trouble. God created Adam with a nature that could be tempted to sin and this nature was styled “very good” yet Adam was able to, and did sin in that nature, it had nothing to do with a serpent, neither was it cursed, it was sin or character that was condemned. And now, because you cannot condemn or curse the character of Jesus, you have to find some other way for rejecting Him as a Substitutionary Sacrifice offered up freely for us all, you look on Him as being cursed on account of His serpent nature, and that He was cursed by the Law of Moses, not realising that it was a criminal who was slain and hanged on a tree that was cursed of God. Our sins were laid upon Jesus when He was lifted up; God laid them upon Him and in this way only. He became a curse for us, not for Himself. Ye do greatly err not knowing the scriptures nor the Love of God.

It is sad that Peter Watkins died in this error of Roberts, Barling, Norris and others of their creed, but high time those who have been snared by these errors, listened to, or read the warnings that have gone out to them since 1873 for their own good, and as a duty to God, who so Loved that He gave His Son free for us all, not as an exhibition of what was due to His nature, but to pay the Debt of life owed to the Edenic Law by giving His own life - free of sin and Adamic federal condemnation - a Ransom for all.

God leaves it to us to take advantage of His Free Gift of Life Eternal on the True understanding of the Cross and the Bible teaching about Redemption not that of men but as Paul received it by revelation. 1 Corinthians 1:17-19; 2:1-10; Galatians 1:11,12.

A humble labourer in Confident Hope of the Coming of Christ, and The Kingdom of God.

Bro. Phil.Parry. 26th August 1992.

The Great Mystery of the Christian Religion

THE PROBLEM. Those who read the Bible and recognise that it is the Word of God intended for our enlightenment, have no doubt that Jesus really lived here on earth and died on the Cross as related in the Gospels. Nor do they imagine that what happened to Him was mere misfortune, for they know that it had been foretold by Jewish prophets whose writings are in the Old Testament and were quoted by Jesus Himself, but they do not understand why His death was in the purpose of God. Very early in His ministry Jesus told His disciples plainly that it would be His fate to fall into the hands of enemies and be killed and although they did not understand Him, it is clear that Jesus Himself saw His death as a sacrifice which He would make on behalf of His friends. How did He know this? What does it mean, and why did He make no attempt to avoid the awful ordeal He saw before Him?

No believer can doubt that His death was in some way essential to salvation and yet no one appears really to know why it was necessary. It is true to say that amongst all the many sects of Christianity there is not one whose creed gives a clear explanation or can tell how it accomplished its purpose. What is the mysterious connection between Jesus dying on the Cross and our salvation? Is it not strange that

Christians, who differ on so many things, are all agreed that we who believe are in some sense saved by the suffering of an innocent man and yet none can show any causal connection between the two things? These are the kind of questions which all thoughtful people ask but to which no reasoned answers are given by the Churches.

The nearest to an explanation is the view that Jesus was an example of a man faithful unto death; that He died a martyr, proving His faith and trust in His Father so complete that He went to His death to declare it. There is some truth in this but it is clearly quite inadequate. He was indeed faithful unto death, but He was not unique in this. Many Christian believers have endured the most dreadful deaths for their faith, but none are regarded as having sacrificed themselves for others as the scriptures represent Jesus to have done. There have been many examples of heroic people who have lost their lives in saving others, but none of them are paralleled with the death of Jesus or their sacrifice regarded as having any redemptive value. Why is it that Jesus could say that He came "to give His life a ransom for many"? What was the unique factor in His death which makes it different from all others?

The purpose of this article is to give the answers to these questions and show where there is an adequate explanation to be found. It is not on the surface, nor in the propositions of a creed but it is there for those who have the eyes to see and the desire to know and while its roots go to the depths of revealed truth it is not so profound that an ordinary simple believer cannot grasp it. One should not be frightened off on the pretext that the subject is too deep - it is not so and we are intended to understand; that is the purpose of the Bible. All that is required is a teachable humble spirit and a willingness to unlearn one or two of the dogmas we have inherited from the past.

MAN IN NATURE. The foundation fact of the Christian revelation is that man is a corruptible creature with a similar physical nature to all the animal species. This is confirmed by everything we learn from science and experience. Made in the image of God means that man has the capacity to reason and a freewill. We can choose to do good things or evil; we can seek to find God and we can hope for a better life, but we are not 'immortal souls' nor anything more than natural creatures with a limited life span (Genesis 2:1). The ultimate purpose of God with this part of creation is to bring the earth into a state of perfection, inhabited by an immortal population under the reign of Jesus Christ, in fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham. The selection of -these people who are chosen to have a part in this future age of glory has been going on throughout the history of the race, in antediluvian times, during all Jewish history, and since the advent of Christ, through the Gospel. These are the ones spoken of in Hebrews who "all died, not having received the promises," but their names are recorded in The Book of Life and when Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom of God they will be raised to life again with immortality and with those who are still living changed to incorruptible nature, will be heirs of the Kingdom (1 Thessalonians 4).

People have different views about the literalness of the Bible account of creation but there is no dispute that the teaching underlying the Genesis story is that when man first became conscious of himself as a person he had the innocence of a child. To develop character he had to learn to distinguish right from wrong and he needed the experience of good and evil and for this reason he was placed under a simple law requiring obedience. When he disobeyed he incurred the sentence of death (Gen. 2:17) and deserved to die. This was not, as Christians have generally believed, a sentence to natural death implying that he commenced to decline towards dissolution, but a legal condemnation to judicial execution. If this had been carried out, he would have perished and the human race would have ended there and then, but his life was spared and he became the progenitor of the family of man to which we belong. But he and his offspring were now in a changed relationship to God, signified by the expulsion from Eden and barring from the Tree of Life - alienated by sin. The so-called Christian doctrine of the Fall, involving the theory that human nature was changed to a defiled condition which makes men sinful, is as mythical as the immortality of the soul. Original Sin is an invention and no part of the Christian religion. If it were true, then it would mean that God is responsible for all evil in the world, since only He could have made us sinful in our nature.

The symbolism of Genesis therefore (e.g. 3:17-24) teaches the first lesson in religion, that those who disobey God's just laws do not deserve to live. But it also shows us that our Creator is a loving God and will be to us a merciful Father, not willing that we should die as sinners but rather that we should live by faith - meaning that there is open to us, by belief in the Gospel, a way to attain to a better life which we could not obtain by perfectness even if we should succeed in living a perfect life. The object and the scope

of this faith are defined by our understanding of what Jesus meant when He said “I lay down my life for my sheep.”

The vital element in the faith which makes a true believer is realisation of our unworthiness and need of mercy - the Bible term is repentance. This is why the prayer “God be merciful to me a sinner” was heard and the other not. The ceremonial sacrifice involving bloodshed, first offered when Adam was clothed with skins, a type of forgiveness, is not a thing familiar to Western people, but it was appointed as the only way of approach to God. This was not because He takes any pleasure in the killing of innocent creatures, but because the ritual required the exercise of that faith in which His sovereign authority is acknowledged.

SACRIFICE IN PRINCIPLE. When a Hebrew brought an unblemished lamb as a sin-offering and its life was ended by the shedding of its blood, it was a practical demonstration of his recognition that in strict justice he himself deserved to die, because he had transgressed some point of the Law. But when he made the appropriate sacrifice and confessed his guilt, he was saved from the penalty he had incurred (Numbers 9:14) and the life of his sin-offering was accepted instead of his own.

This is the principle underlying the law of sacrifice and it provides the key to an understanding of the great sacrifice of Christ which was foreshadowed.

Referring to sacrifices in the Mosaic system, the Epistle to the Hebrews (10:1-4) says, “it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin,” and the reason is evident. The life of an animal was not the equivalent of the life of a man and while it was accepted to obtain remission of personal sins, no offering of a lamb could give effective deliverance from an indebtedness in which the life of the whole race had been lost by the disobedience in the beginning. The many ceremonial offerings made under the Law and the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement were primarily part of the educational process of Israel and their purpose was to lead them to Christ, but they were of no efficacy to remove the constitutional alienation by which - for the very special purpose of making it possible for sinners to be saved - all men are regarded as in Adam. That is why it says that for salvation it needed a “better sacrifice than these” and “so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9).

When John the Baptist said of Jesus “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,” he was not referring to the general sinfulness of mankind, for this is clearly still very much with us. What Jesus took away on behalf of those who accept Him as their saviour, is the “conclusion” by which we are still all alienated from our Father in Heaven and legally dead even while we are physically living.

The life which was lost by sin was that life breathed into Adam when he became a living soul and although, reprieved from death he was able to pass on his physical life to his offspring, they were nevertheless born in a legally dead state and doomed to perish. Hope was only possible in the mercy of God, and this was shown when Jesus declared the purpose of His coming into the world in the words of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

RANSOM. What exactly did Jesus mean by His life a ransom for many? One definitive statement which throws light on this is in the Apostle Paul’s farewell to the church at Ephesus. “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock... which he hath purchased with his own blood.” How were they purchased and how could His blood be the price? The answer is in the law of redemption set out in 25th Leviticus and other places. These provided that an inheritance lost by reason of the poverty or misfortune of its owner, or a person sold into bondage could be redeemed by the payment of ransom money. In Israel, a near kinsman had not only the right, but a duty towards his poorer brother, if he had the means, to buy back his freedom. The principle, on a national scale, was established by the requirement that every adult person and every firstborn domestic animal, was to be ransomed for a fixed price or put to death; “The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel... to make an atonement for your souls” (Leviticus 30:15). Thus the Mosaic Law, in which our Christian religion has its roots, makes the recognition of man’s alienated state an issue of life and death.

In his inspired exposition of the Federal Principle in the Epistle to the Romans Paul explains how through the one act of disobedience the many were constituted sinners, - not made to be sinful but delivered

into the power of SIN, or in the figure he uses, sold into bondage to sin personified as a slave-owner, from which captivity they could only be freed by someone with the necessary price in his own possession to pay the ransom. This is what Jesus did when He gave His life for the life of the world - He purchased us back to God at the cost of His own life which was in the blood that was shed when He died on the Cross - a life for a life. In the terrible mental agony of Gethsemane, knowing what lay before Him, Jesus endured because He realised that He was indeed the Lamb of God slain prophetically from the foundation of the world. From Moses and the Prophets He had learned that to justify the forbearance of God in passing over sins and to uphold the supremacy of Divine Law, the debt incurred by sin had to be paid and He knew that He alone could pay it and not perish. This is why He answered not a word to His false accusers, but allowed Himself to be crucified, bearing a condemnation which was utterly unjust and a penalty He had never deserved, in order to cancel, by the forfeit of His own life the liability which sinners could not pay themselves without perishing for ever.

The ransom principle is the only solution compatible with reason to the problem which has troubled Christians for centuries, of why Jesus had to be the Son of God. The only alternative, that it was to endow Him with the power to resist temptation which we lack, is utterly offensive. As a child of Mary, Jesus was a man like other men, a member of the human family and capable of suffering temptation and pain like ourselves, but He was brought into existence by the miracle of the Virgin Birth. Mary bore Him, and she supplied the material elements of His being. His flesh and blood, but she did not give Him life. This came direct from the source of all life, by the operation of the Holy Spirit as related in the Gospels. The crucial importance of this lies in the fact that although His mother was a descendant of Adam, Jesus did not belong to the Adamic family but to God. His mother was a chosen member of a redeemed people, "the handmaid of the Lord," herself the subject of the ransom paid under the Law, and therefore to speak, as some do, of Jesus inheriting condemnation through her or of His blood defiled by sin, is an offence against reason

Jesus was human, not divine, but His divine origin constituted Him the only one of the human race whose life had not been forfeited by sin and who therefore had in His possession the price of redemption. He had learned that He was the near-kinsman of his brother who had sold himself into bondage under Sin, and the right of redemption pertained to Him. He alone had the '*anti-lutron*,' the ransom, a free unforfeited life, which He could pay if He chose, to redeem Adam and all who are included in him under the federal principle, purchasing them back to God. This, apart from His sinlessness, is the difference between Him and us to which Paul refers when he wrote, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." His riches were His life; our poverty was that we were without God and without hope in the world because of sin.

Those who have sought to explain His death as a vicarious punishment or as the destruction of a sinful nature have done both Jesus and His Father a grievous wrong. Him because if His death was in any sense necessary for His own deliverance it could not have been a sacrifice on behalf of others, and God because it would be totally unjust to punish the innocent in order that the guilty might go free.

Jesus undoubtedly suffered for sins, as Peter says, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," but the principle of the Atonement is not punishment but the redemption of sinners. The idea that the wrath of God against us was averted by inflicting upon Jesus what we deserved is a mockery of justice and abhorrent in the extreme. Seen as a sacrifice provided by God Himself and voluntarily entered into by Jesus of His own free will, it is indeed a revelation of His love and the readiness to forgive and calls forth our love and gratitude.

Some may ask, "If He was not Himself in some way liable to death, why could God require such a sacrifice from Jesus?" The answer is that God never did require it, in the sense of a test of obedience. His purpose required that justice and law should be upheld and if sinners were to be saved a ransom had to be found, and this purpose was entrusted to Jesus, but He was not obliged to obey - it was with Him a free choice. "No man taketh it from me, I lay it down of myself" (John 10:18). He submitted Himself to the will of His Father because He knew what was at stake. Even at the last hour, impaled on the Cross, He had it in His power to summon a legion of angels to deliver Him, but He endured "for the joy that was set before Him" knowing that if His courage failed. His Father's plan for this creation would have failed.

“HIS BLOOD BE ON US” As the Gospel accounts show clearly, the plot against Jesus, His trial and crucifixion, were the doing of ordinary human beings acting of their own volition, and as they thought, in their own best national interests. They were perhaps not much worse than their counterparts in the world today, who would be capable of committing the same crime in similar circumstances. It did not need supernatural influence to move them to murderous fury against the man who had made their hypocrisy so obvious, far less the hand of God. The envy and hatred they nurtured in their own hearts was quite sufficient to determine His destruction. It has to be recognised that God knew from the beginning what would happen to Jesus, for it was foretold in the promise to Eve of a seed who should bruise the serpent’s head, but God did not bring it about. The events which led to His condemnation were the result of the interaction of human affairs, foreknown in Heaven and made the foundation of the plan of redemption. When the prophet Isaiah says, “It pleased the Lord to bruise him” it simply means that He made the deliberate choice to allow His Own Son to suffer, if He could endure, in order to make possible the salvation of the world.

It need hardly be said that no sacrifice could be in itself of any benefit to God and only the response it evokes in us has any value. Even those made by Israel came to be an evil stench when they were offered without understanding. In those days God was terrifying and unapproachable and would be the same to us apart from Christ. As creatures, we cannot even conceive the person, far less the mind of Him who has made all things, who is everywhere present and in all, who is eternal in time and almighty, but He has entered into human affairs in a strange and unique way and it is clearly the intention that we should seek to know why. In His infinite wisdom He has chosen to make our hope of a future life conditional upon acceptance of what in history was simply the wicked murder of a man who was innocent and utterly good, as a sacrifice made by God Himself to save us, and when it comes to light that this man was His only begotten Son, the child born to be the heir of all things, “My beloved, in whom I am well pleased,” God is revealing Himself as a loving Father, and, what no words nor any other means could similarly express, the love He has towards all mankind in that this was the One He gave in order that we might not perish. Is it not clearly His expectation that we should recognise that He has feelings like ourselves and that He must have suffered in the same way as any father would suffer, only more deeply, in the anguish of His Son? If God could not experience in person the sufferings of Jesus, who can doubt that He suffered in seeing His chosen One, holy and harmless, rejected by men and cruelly put to death? We cannot know how or to what extent One who is God is capable of sorrow but we can be sure that this is what it is the purpose of the Atonement to make plain, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself and that the cost was very great.

The impact of this knowledge upon our minds is the thing that matters, and the purpose of the writer has been to explain the meaning of the facts and what they tell us about God. When a believer is baptised, it is a symbolic dying and burial which testifies to his faith that Jesus literally died for him, and he is the subject of an immediate change of status, a liberation resulting from a rebirth. He is no longer under Sin and condemnation, but set free; no longer an alien but an adopted child of God. Our salvation therefore has actually happened - it is not something in the doubtful future - we are saved through the love of God when the life blood of Jesus poured from the fatal wounds inflicted by evil men. That is the glory of the true Christian revelation. This is what God wishes us to know and to put our trust in. That is why it is based upon a scripture principle which is unchangeable - ransom - a transaction in history which can never be altered or reversed. A price, a life, has been paid to redeem us to God, and because it can never be recovered we can have the assurance, now and for ever, that living or dead we belong to God, and, weak as we may be and needing to ask for forgiveness, if we do not deny Him, He will never deny us. We know that we shall receive the Aeonian life when Jesus returns because He died to secure it to us under the promise of God, and God cannot break His promise.

Brother Ernest Brady.

“But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” - Luke 19:27.

There was an air of expectancy amongst the disciples of Jesus as they were making their way up to Jerusalem for the last time for “they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear,” so Jesus tells them a parable. They were at Jericho, so using local history, Jesus tells the story of a nobleman going into a far country to receive a kingdom. The local man had been Archelaus, the Governor, who had his palace at Jericho and who had gone to Rome to receive the title of king. However, in the case of Archelaus a delegation of the Jews followed him to Rome to protest against him being made king over them and being successful in their quest, Archelaus returned to Jericho without the title. But that is another story.

The parable concerns Jesus Himself for He was telling His disciples that He was going away to receive a Kingdom and while He was away His disciples should have certain responsibilities to see that His affairs are kept in good order. But here we wish to concern ourselves with only the last statement of the parable - that Jesus should have His enemies brought before Him to be slain in His presence.

Jesus Christ received His title and is King but He also bears the title of Prince of Peace and it seems incongruous that He should have His enemies brought before Him that they may be literally put to death in His presence, so what are we to understand by this metaphor?

Today the Jews in Israel are in the main a godless nation though there are among them some who are expecting their Messiah to come very soon, but they, of course, do not believe that Jesus Christ is their Messiah and reject any notion of Him reigning over them.

Prior to Christ’s return, the nation of Israel will be dreadfully devastated and two-thirds of the people will perish; of the remainder we read in Zechariah 13:9, “and I will bring a third part of them through the fire, and refine them as silver is refined, and I will try them as gold is tried: they will call on my name and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, the Lord is my God.”

It is these who are brought before Jesus at His coming, and they are brought before Him for their conversion. They are mortified at the full realisation of what their forefathers had done to their Messiah, and of what He has done for them as The Passover Lamb, the antitype of all Passover lambs slain year by year.

“And they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and they shall be in bitterness for him, as one is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon, and the land shall mourn, every family apart... All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.” Zechariah 12:10-14.

This, I suggest, is their “slaying” – their mortifying and their conversion, for it signals their “death” to the past, henceforth to live unto God as a “special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth.” Deuteronomy 7:6. Also Exodus 19:5.

I welcome your thoughts please.

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

There are many events in this book which bear close parallel to the time when Israel will enter the Holy Land for the second time, under the leadership of Christ.

There are more incidents however, where, though we cannot see an exact parallel, there is nevertheless something we can learn from them for our exhortation. There is the incident when the Gibeonites by acting deceitfully, pretending to have come from a far country, entered into a covenant with Joshua and the elders of Israel. Although they acted deceitfully, it cannot have been much to the credit of Joshua and the elders. They apparently had not consulted God in this matter. It seems they suspected something like this, for they said, “peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you?” They knew it was against God’s express command to make a covenant with the inhabitants of Canaan; and there was the Ark in the midst of the camp, the proper means for speaking with God. Previous to this, in the calamity over Achan’s trespass, they had prayed before the Ark; but now that no actual emergency threatened they neglected it. And so this covenant was made and once this covenant was made, we read that it had to stand. The fact that they found out afterwards who they really were was no excuse for breaking their word. The princes said, “We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we cannot touch them.” It seems therefore, that according to the statutes then in force a covenant before God was binding, even though facts came to light afterwards which, had they been known before, the covenant would not have been concluded.

Yes, God is against covenant breaking in any form, even though in this case it violated one of God’s earlier commandments not to enter into a covenant with the inhabitants of the country. These Gibeonites were completely ignorant of God and it must be admitted they acted very subtly. As soon as the men of Israel suspected that they dwelt amongst them they began to tell their story of having come from afar. The elders of Israel were so completely taken in and so impressed by their story that they made the league before realising their mistake. In one sense the Gibeonites won the day - their object to escape with their lives and not to have their city destroyed was admittedly achieved. It is another example of the children of this world being in their generation wiser than the children of Light.

We next consider the day when the sun and moon stood still. This was surely the most dramatic means in the whole Bible history from creation to the return of Christ by which God intervened and changed the laws of nature to His own purpose. This was the most decisive battle of Joshua’s campaign. It was against a confederacy of nations. Once this confederacy was broken up through defeat in the field the rest was just a matter of dealing with isolated pockets of resistance. But on the outcome of this battle depended whether or not the Israelites were ever to be able to settle as an organised nation. Hence the reason for God’s unusual intervention. It was an occasion of unusually great moment; and so God displayed His power and His might in an unusually mighty and awe inspiring manner.

Yes, how privileged were those children of Israel to see that act of God: He directed the whole battle for them. First He discomfited the enemy with hail, and then this tremendous miracle. It must have put the fear of their lives into those people in the enemy camp, to see the sun and moon stand still, and to see the day drag on and on, leaving them no hiding place, no respite. Now at the return of Christ, we are told by the prophet Zechariah, somewhat similar events will take place. Again a decisive battle will have to be fought against an even stronger confederacy of nations. Those who shout “Let us break their bands asunder, let us cast their cords from us” will encamp against the antitypical Joshua, even Jesus and His saints. Again on its outcome much will depend; this time whether or not God is ruling in the world. And again there will be a spectacular divine intervention spreading fear and panic into the enemy camp. This time it will be a mighty earthquake, so mighty that there will be changes in the landscape of Palestine, when the Mount of Olives will be split in two. As in Joshua’s campaign, it will be an unusual day, and again in the evening it will be light (Zechariah 14:7), “But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening it shall be light.” What a dreadful experience this must be to the enemies of the Lord: the hardships of the war, the heat of the battle, then the awful earthquake and, at the end of the day, when everybody feels ready for a good night’s sleep, probably conscience stricken and wanting to hide from the Lord, the fact will be brought home to them that there is no hiding. They will then be learning the lesson which Adam, Eve, and Cain and others learned when they sinned and wanted to hide from God. But there will be no hiding; and they may not even have the means of escape which the sinners of all previous generations had: the blood of Christ. It will be too late then and they will learn what the Psalmist told them some 3,000 years ago (Psalm 2), “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.”

Next comes to mind the incident when two and a half tribes which had their inheritance on the other side of Jordan departed and built an altar as a witness for future generations. This gave rise to a misunderstanding, the sort of misunderstandings that will arise with the limited human knowledge and judgment. Had the children of Israel been hasty, it might have led to war and bloodshed. Perhaps they had learned a lesson from their earlier experience with the Gibeonites. However this matter was cleared up to the satisfaction of all sides.

Finally, let us consider Joshua's last admonition to the Israelites before his death. And there is this statement; "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

This, my dear brethren and sisters is the question which everybody on the day of his conversion has to answer for himself. We all had to make this choice one day in our lives; whether to be of the world and to serve "the gods of this world," the lusts of the flesh, doing our own will, or whether to serve the Lord, doing His will, Joshua did not try to force the children of Israel into it; he did not go beyond persuasion. God does not want men to serve Him out of fear or in any way just because it is a good custom, or because our parents do it. He wants men and women to serve Him as a result of their own decision, every time. It is not always an easy decision, and it should not be made hastily. It is a step for life, for there is no drawing back. So Joshua, trying the children of Israel, gave them a chance to contract out, or at any rate pretended to do so: he tried them hard that day. First he said; "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve." And they chose the Lord. So to be quite sure that their answer came not just at the spur of the moment, he said; "Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins..." But again, the people made the right decision: "Nay, but we will serve the Lord." The people had made their decision: if only they had kept it with that same determination! "And Joshua said unto the people. Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses." "Ye are witnesses against yourselves." Yes, it was their decision/ and their responsibility from that day on. And when we made our decision, it was and is our responsibility. If it was genuine it was not to please some friend, but only with the sole purpose of pleasing God. And it will be our responsibility to the end of our probation.

Now Joshua's first admonition after they had made their decision was; "Now therefore put away the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel." And this admonition never loses its force or its necessity to ourselves. "Put away the strange gods." We are not likely in our day to commit actual idolatry, as this is not the present fashion of our part of the world, but we all have to be on our guard lest we are enticed to serve the "god of this world" in one form or another; lest we set our hearts on worldly possessions and worldly wisdom, or prefer the esteem of friends to the approval of God.

Let us be aware that in course of time, our decision to serve the Lord sticks in our minds as if we made it but yesterday. So many things of this world lose their thrill once the newness of them has worn off - let us ensure that this never happens to what we promised on the day we were converted. We cannot afford to let it wear off. This happened to Israel after the flesh. They forgot the Lord all too often; and, unfortunately, also too often, we hear of people in our day falling away after having made a good start in the Lord.

Let us keep constantly before us Joshua's warning. It is good advice and, if observed, it provides the answer to all temptations and trials, and all forms of discouragement which we get from time to time - it is to be found in Joshua 24:2^ and it is this: "Incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel."

Brother Leo Dreifuss.

Final Extract from

THE DEVIL AND HELL OF THE BIBLE

Chapter Twelve

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

To the average Bible reader, the Rich Man and Lazarus give ample Bible proof for the existence of a literal, burning hell. However, does it?

Before we go into detail, let us summarize the meaning of the narrative. First, it is a parable covering briefly the entire plan of salvation. The rich man represents the segment of the covenant-makers who are satisfied to go their own way through life without recognizing God or His authority over their lives. They are content to “eat, drink, and be merry,” with no thought of the day of Final Account, or just retribution. They eat at the Lord’s Table of the doctrinal truths He offers, allowing the “crumbs” - the details of practical Christian living - to fall to the ground. On the other hand, Lazarus recognizes his critical spiritual condition - full of sores, spiritually speaking - and craves the “crumbs” of correction that the rich man spurns.

At the day of Judgment, Lazarus, the doer, will be “comforted,” will inherit life eternal, while the rich man, those who have said, “Lord, Lord,” but have not done the things commanded them, will be in torments.

But not physical torments. Luke 13:28 explains Jesus’ meaning: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.” They will find themselves in the “place of torment” until the time of their ultimate demise. Having travelled the “Broad way” leading to destruction, they will in the end be completely removed from the scene of action, receiving the wages of sin, eternal death (Romans 6:23).

Briefly, this is the message of the parable. Why do we believe this?

Some religious groups refuse to accept the story as a parable, claiming that Jesus was telling about an actual event. But we read in Matthew 13:34: “All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them.” When Jesus addressed the multitude He always spoke in parables and, as we are told in Mark 4:34, when alone with His disciples, “he expounded all things.”

In attempting to understand the Bible, we must not go to the parable for light, but first to the plain teachings of Jesus or to those of His disciples to whom He expounded all these things. This is one problem with much of the religious world: they have done the opposite. They build their faith on a private interpretation of a parable and not on the plain testimonies of the Bible. But if we would arrive at the truth of God, we must let God explain that which is uncertain by that which is clearly understandable, building our faith on the plain evidence, and then the parables can be made to harmonise with that teaching.

A parable is a figurative illustration, sometimes called “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” Jesus used these illustrations to teach great lessons and to give us deeper insight into God’s laws and plans.

So let us try to understand the parable in the light of Bible teaching.

A Rich Man....

Jesus begins (Luke 16:19): “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.” Jesus is dividing those who come to eat at the Lord’s table into two classes: faithful and

unfaithful. The term “rich” as used in the Bible does not necessarily mean rich in houses and lands and gold. A man may be rich in his own estimation, proud, rich in evil, rich in his own ways. In Revelation 3:17 we read of those who say they are rich: “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked.” Here Jesus is speaking of those who prove unfaithful, those who think they are right in God’s sight but are not. They are blind to their true status with God. They do not realize their serious condition, that they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind,” that they are “naked” because not clothed with the robe of righteousness, the fine linen clean and white (Revelation 19:7,8).

Then in Revelation 3:18 Jesus offers to help this class: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:17 - 19). God will send words of reproof and warning; but those of the rich-man class reject all this. Like the rich man in the parable, they are satisfied with themselves. They think they are right; but before God they are poor.

... and Lazarus

Jesus continues with the parable: “And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus.’ Lazarus is the Latinised form of Eleazer, meaning, “God is my help.” He was a beggar imploring the help and aid of God, seeking strength to resist his besetting sins. He was hungry, asking for the bread of heaven and the water of life which the rich man so carelessly rejected. He was not satisfied with the pleasures and comforts of this short, fleeting life. He wanted eternal life and the friendship of God, and he knew that he had to humble himself and eat every word of God to obtain that friendship.

Spiritual Sores

Jesus says further: “And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores” (v. 20). This beggar was full of sores, but need they be literal sores? No, Lazarus represents a class of men and women who realize their need for spiritual help. They are not blind; they know they have sores which need healing.

We read in the Bible of these spiritual sores. “For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness... For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh” (Psalm 38:4,5,7). These spiritual sores - our iniquities, our transgressions - always need immediate attention, sores of anger and malice and selfishness and jealousy and pride and envy.

The class represented by the beggar feel their iniquities, the burden of their sins, and are continually asking for help; they realize they have sores, while the class represented by the rich man, preoccupied with themselves and their pleasures, ask for no help; they think they have need of nothing.

What is the cure for these sores? We read in Psalm 107:20, “He sent his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” The Word of God is the healing medicine. It tells us how to put away all our pride, foolishness, sensitiveness, and every evil. “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?” (Jeremiah 8:22). Excellent healing oil is available for all who will apply it:

“Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psalm 141:5).

“And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table” (Verse 21). The Lord has provided a table, and on it has spread the bread of heaven and all the dainties and delicacies of His furnishing. And we must eat all He has provided, even to the crumbs.

The word “crumbs” is significant. These crumbs are the details of daily, practical Christian living which the self-satisfied pay no attention to. They are the trifles which if properly utilized add up to perfection.

Many people think that it is not necessary to take notice of every little crumb; they say that Jesus ate every word of God for us, and we do not need to be concerned with such little things.

But the Lazarus class take an entirely different attitude. They are humble, willing to concern themselves with the little details of daily life. They say, “No! I want the reward; I want the joy; I want the home that will be eternal, and I know that I must keep every commandment of God to obtain it.” And so they eagerly grasp every crumb that falls to them.

Dogs - Evil Men and Women

“Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores” (verse 21). Were these literal dogs? No, we must be consistent. Literal dogs could not lick spiritual sores. As the apostle Paul says, we must compare spiritual things with spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:13). Generally, throughout the Bible, dogs represent wicked workers, those with whom God is displeased. They are evil workers, men and women of evil dispositions, those not tamed by the power of God’s law. And they sometimes bring persecution and trials which can be for the development of the righteous. In this way they help to heal the sores of the Lazarus class.

Those striving to be righteous, those of the Lazarus class, may be thrown into difficult circumstances; they may be surrounded by people who do not understand them, people who never seem to consult their taste or ideas, people who always oppose them and put them in the background, who answer a pleasant greeting with a snarl and pick flaws with them however hard they try to do right. In this way also the dogs lick the sores of hurt feelings, and heal them up.

Death and Resurrection

Then Jesus brings us to the end of the day of opportunity for these two classes:

“And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried” (verse 22,) The faithful of past ages help to compose that beggar. Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Daniel and Paul and all those who walked in the footsteps of the Master and who have died are resting in the grave. They invested their lives in God’s service and are waiting to be resurrected and rewarded.

There are two events in this verse: the faithful die, and they are carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom - a phrase denoting “a state of celestial happiness.” But must these two events occur simultaneously?

The Bible explains when the faithful will be gathered: “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: ... He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Psalm 50:3-5). When our God, Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23) shall come, then the faithful will be gathered.

In Mark 13:26, 27, Jesus also tells us the time when the angels shall gather the faithful: “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds, with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.” When will they be gathered? Not when they die but when Christ returns.

Therefore, in Jesus’ parable, between the time that the beggar dies and the time he is carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom, there has occurred his sleep of death, the Resurrection of all the covenant-makers, the return of Christ, and the Judgment. No one receives his reward at the time of his death.

Hell, the Grave

We read further in the parable: “And it came to pass, that the... rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:22,23). The reading here would suggest that the rich man died, was buried, and then in hell was still conscious. However, if this were true, Jesus would be contradicting plain Bible teaching, that a person in death knows nothing: “The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything” (Ecclesiastes 9:5); “this breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psalm 146:4).

The Douay Version allows this thought: “And it came to pass that the... rich man also died; and he was buried in hell.” Hell in the Bible is the grave, not a place of eternal torment. The word in the Greek, as we have seen, is hades, meaning the grave. The rich man was buried in the grave, where all the dead rest. In 1 Corinthians 15:55 the same word hades is translated “grave;” “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

“And he lifted up his eyes in torment.” When the rich man lifted up his eyes in torment, he was not in the grave; there is no torment in death, for the dead “know not anything,” whether faithful or unfaithful. But the Resurrection has intervened, and the parable is now a representation of the Judgment. “He lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (verse 23).

What is this torment? We read in Luke 13:24-28 of the torment of the unfaithful and of the cause of their distress: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, ail ye workers of iniquity.” He says “Depart” because they are workers of iniquity. And then, “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.”

The unfaithful will be in torment, not while they are dead but after they are resurrected, when, in the presence of the Lamb and all the holy angels, the decision of the Judge having been rendered, they realize the reward they could have had. For the first time in their lives they are fully aware of the magnitude of their fatal mistake. What could have been the brightest and most glorious moment of their lives will be so dark that their reaction will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Torment vs. Comfort

Then the faithful are represented again in verse 24: “And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” Here is fire used as a symbol of destruction, of the judgments of God - a figure used frequently throughout the Bible. If the rich man were being tormented in literal flames, how much relief would the tip of a finger dipped in literal water bring? The rich man wants relief; he says, Send Lazarus, that I may get water. This is the same water of which Jesus gave to the woman of Samaria (John 4:14). During his day of opportunity the rich man rejected this water, now he desires it, but it is too late. As we read in Proverbs 1:28-31: “Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer: they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.”

How much consolation does Abraham give to the rich man’s plea? “But Abraham said. Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented” (verse 25). The rich man had his own way, went where he pleased, spoke as he pleased, thought as he pleased. He was having his own way, while Lazarus was willing to take up his cross and deny himself, eating every crumb that fell from the rich man’s table. Lazarus accepted that which the rich man rejected, the trials and testings, reproofs and warnings, and stood firm for truth and righteousness.

A Great Gulf Fixed

“And beside all this,” the parable continues, “there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us/ that would come from thence” (verse 26).

What is this gulf? It is the unalterable decision of the Judge.

Christ has rendered His decision which separates the two classes for ever, the sheep from the goats, the chaff from the wheat, the faithful from the unfaithful, He says to the faithful, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” But to the goats He will say, “Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity;” you had your chance. God gave you your opportunity and you rejected it. Now the decision of the Judge has separated between you, and you cannot pass over: “There is a great gulf fixed.” There is no such thing as crossing. The Judgment is over, Abraham the father of the faithful, and all his children are then enjoying the bliss of an endless life for which they sought by denying themselves of all evil and eating every crumb of God’s Word during their lifetimes.

The Rich Man’s Petition

Now we come to another scene of the parable: the rich man asks that Lazarus may be sent to his father’s house, to warn them of the destruction that will come upon them if they resist Christ’s authority. “Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: for I have five brethren; that he might testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” Who are these five brethren? They represent the nations of the world, those from whom will be developed the subjects of the Kingdom during the thousand-year reign of Christ. Five is a round number meaning all. When Christ comes, only the covenant-makers from Adam until His coming will be called to Judgment. After this the everlasting gospel will be preached “to all that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6). All will be caused to know the Lord from the least to the greatest. And the unfaithful will want them to know and understand the seriousness of their covenant with God, so they will not come to this sad end, forever separated from the righteous and their eternal home.

Abraham is represented as answering the rich man’s plea unsympathetically:

“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” The rich man replies:

“Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent’ (verse 30). Here is the key to the whole subject of this parable - “if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.” It is after the resurrection from the dead, for the rich man wants someone who has been resurrected to go and plead with them.

But Abraham answers, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (verse 31).

As truly as there is a God in heaven, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus does not teach eternal torment in hellfire!

Megiddo Church