

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No 208

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EDITORIAL

Dear Brothers and Sisters and Friends, Loving Greetings.

Isaiah was not only the most remarkable of the prophets, but he is also considered to be by far the greatest writer in the Old Testament and he was evidently a magnificent preacher. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls is the complete manuscript of Isaiah. It contains all sixty-six chapters set out in fifty-four columns of Hebrew. The scroll is 24 feet long and is made of 17 leather sheets sewn to each other with linen thread and it is the best preserved and longest ancient manuscript of the Bible we possess.

When Isaiah was about twenty-five he had a vision of God "...and I heard the voice of the Lord saying 'Whom shall I send...' 'Isaiah said, 'Here I am! Send me.'" From that day he devoted himself to prophecy. His prophecies covered about half a century. Isaiah foretells the birth of Jesus "...behold a virgin shall conceive." Also the wonder of Jesus' reign as Messiah and King in the thrilling words "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Isaiah uses sparkling prose and brilliant images but more important than the language is the thought for what, as a whole, the Book of Isaiah does is to show a maturing of the dealing of God with His creation; religion is now concerned with justice and with judgment, judgment of nations and judgment of the individual person.

Unlike the Greeks, the Israelites, under the inspiration of Isaiah, were moving towards a pure monotheism. It is now clearly revealed that God is universal, ubiquitous and omnipotent. God is the motivating force throughout history. He created the universe; He directs it; He will end it. Israel is part of His plan and He uses the good and evil people who come and go in His world to forward this plan. The book of Isaiah puts the stress on the individual as the bearer of Faith. This is all part of the discovery of the individual, a giant step forward in human self-knowledge. The Greeks would soon be moving in the same direction but the Jews were the forerunners as they so often have been in many fields of human endeavour.

Isaiah warns of catastrophe. 'Watchman, what of the night?' he asks 'Watchman, what of the night?' Foolish men take no notice: they say 'Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.' Or they put their trust in fortifications and alliances. Instead as Isaiah says, they should obey the Lord's command: 'Set thy house in order.' This means repentance and a moral change of heart, an internal reform for both individuals and the community. Provided there is a change of heart, the Lord is always forgiving, '...though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow.'

Isaiah tells us of the age of peace that is to come “...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” In this age of peace ‘the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.’

Paul tells us that when we are grafted into the true vine we become ‘the children of the promise.’ Isaiah too, proves how deeply personal our relationship is with the Almighty when we acknowledge Him through His beloved Son, as our Saviour and Redeemer, with the comforting words “...fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.”

Love to all. Helen Brady.

RESURRECTION, JUDGMENT AND THE SECOND DEATH

“God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe on him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

God is love and His laws are established on that love and are fitting for the good of mankind, and all His judgments are grounded upon obedience to His laws.

Our purpose here is to give brief consideration to the Resurrection, the Judgments subsequent to the return of Jesus Christ, and the Second Death.

We will commence by looking at the –

Judgment of the Nations

To consider the coming judgment of the nations it will be helpful if we look back and see examples of God’s dealings with the human race.

Although God is not willing that any should perish He knew from Creation that most people would not come to Him, therefore He left them to their own devices though He called out some from their midst to be a special people to Him. Genesis gives us the account of how God chose Israel out of all the nations of the earth to be a separate people. The rest of the nations were left to their own ways; God did not openly intervene in their affairs with exceptions of the flood of Noah’s day, the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and perhaps Jonah’s visit to Nineveh. Apart from these we can see with the eye of faith, His judgments upon the nations from time to time for their gross inhumanity. However, it can still be said that time and chance happen to all men for God is not entreated by such people that He should intervene in their affairs for their good.

In due time Jesus Christ came into the world to preach the gospel first of all to Israel but Israel as a nation rejected it and Him and were in turn rejected for their disobedience and lack of faith. Through the Gospel people were again called out from the nations to be a special people. So, while we find today that most people know of Abraham - Jew, Christian and Arab (and Muslim) - few people choose to know God, and history shows that they preferred to believe in many gods and follow innumerable superstitions, and in modern times science has supposedly ruled out a Creator so that Atheism is commonplace.

However, sin is not imputed to those who do not know God and His laws. These people pass through life and die as does the animal kingdom. Paul tells us in Romans 2:12, “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law:” For these peoples and nations there is yet to be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation upon the earth (Daniel 12:1), when godless people of the world will be judged, not according to the Law of sin and death but according to God’s righteous judgments, before the

establishment of the reign of Jesus Christ upon the earth; the time for which we pray when God's will will be done on earth as it is now done in heaven. This judgment of God is typified by the flood as Jesus tells - "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37), and "Likewise as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day, that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." (Luke 17:28). The Apostle Peter gives us more: 2 Peter 3:7, "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men... (verse 10). But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

Next we will see when the unfaithful are judged; those who are –

Called but not chosen.

Jesus said, "Many be called but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16). What did He mean? He does not mean that He has called the nations of the world for they do not know Him but that He has called people out of the nations - called to hear the gospel message. We have a parallel with Israel of old. As we noted above God chose Abraham for his faith and obedience under trial and made of him, through the Patriarchs, the nation of Israel. All Israelites were born into covenant relationship to God and were responsible to keep His Law - the Law of Moses. Deuteronomy 28:1 reads, "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth." And then follows all the blessings dependent on faith and obedience after the example of Abraham. God made it quite clear that faith and obedience to His Law were required.

But Israel as a nation failed. Deuteronomy 28:15 warned them what distress failure would bring - "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee..." Then follows a long list of judgments, all of which were fulfilled.

While Israel as a nation failed there was a remnant in every generation that were saved. Paul reminds his readers of this in Romans 9:6 - "they are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither because they are of the seed of Abraham are they all children... They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."

In His life of 33 years Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses. He completed its purpose and God turned to the Gentiles and once again people were called out to be a people for His Name, who would show faith in and obedience to His Son. All who are called become responsible to Jesus. They claim covenant relationship with Jesus and learn something of their dependence on Him, if not for their very existence, at least for their hope of a future life. They hear the gospel and learn something of God and of His laws. They claim Jesus as their Saviour and expect the promised reward for the righteous but in doing and preaching what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6) they do not serve Him as they ought. Paul, when writing to the Romans, says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness: because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them." (Romans 1:18,19).

Sadly, false doctrines entered the early church and were accepted as the recognised standard of beliefs; doctrines of the Trinity, Original Sin, the Immaculate Conception, Supernatural Devil, Eternal Torment of the wicked, Heaven going for the righteous, Hades the Intermediate State, Infant Baptism, Immortality of the Soul, etc. When the churches divided they all took with them one or more of these false teachings. Today it has been estimated there are about two thousand denominations all claiming to teach Bible truth but this is impossible.

Is it too much to say that they all come into the “many” who “are called” but not chosen?

The New Testament continually exhorts us to follow Jesus and seek diligently to do His will, and with the failure to do so comes the warning of coming judgment. For example we turn to the teaching of Jesus: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” John 15:4,5.

Again, Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matthew 7:21-23). Supposing themselves to be Christians in no way establishes their place amongst Jesus’ friends - “Ye are my friends” said Jesus “if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

When Jesus comes again, will He find faith on the earth? It is a question Jesus Himself poses but doesn’t answer (Luke 18:8). When will “they that have done evil” come forth to resurrection and Judgment? Will it be at the coming of Jesus to establish His Kingdom? No, not at the coming of Jesus, as we shall see.

But let us first look at the Greek. There are, in the New Testament alone more than 20 Greek words variously translated judge, judgment, condemn, condemnation, damned and damnation, and translators have added to the confusion by not keeping consistently to any one translation for each word. Consequently we find such examples as John 5 where in verses 22 to 30 the one Greek word *krisis* is translated “judgment,” “condemnation” and “damnation” without clear reason. Here are the verses in question: -

“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment (*krisis*) unto the Son... He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation (*krisis*); but is passed from death unto life... and hath given him authority to execute judgment (*krisis*) also, because he is the Son of man... and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (*krisis*)... I can do nothing of mine own self: as I hear, I judge and my judgment (*krisis*) is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”

Here is made the distinction between “they that have done good (who) come forth to the resurrection of life” and “they that have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” So we ask, do these two resurrections occur at the same time? And we answer, no, not at the same time.

Let’s look a little further. Not only do we find confusion with regard to the understanding of words translated “judgment” but also of “The Judgment Seat of Christ.”

Paul wrote that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10). (See also Romans 14:10).

But is this a judgment seat as we would find in a court of law? The Greek word translated “Judgement Seat” is *bema*. Strong’s Concordance gives the definition for *bema* as: “A step. By implication, a rostrum i.e. a tribunal”

While it can be a place of Judgment such as a court of law, as for example, before the crucifixion, Pilate was “set down on the judgment seat (*bema*)” at Jesus’ trial (Matthew 27:19), and in Acts 18:12,16 and 17 when Paul was brought before the judgment seat (*bema*) of Gallio, and Acts 25:6,10 and 17, where he is before the Judgment seat (*bema*) of Festus, but “*bema*” has a much wider meaning. We read in Acts 12:21 of the time when Herod, “arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne (*bema*), and made an oration unto them.” While in Acts 7:5 we read of the promise made to Abraham where God “gave him none inheritance in it (i.e. the promised land), no, not so much as ‘to set foot on’ (*bema*).”

The “*bema*” is in fact a raised step to speak from and in early Greek churches it applied to the chancel. The Shorter English Dictionary says it is also the platform from which Athenian orators spoke.

This gives us a better idea of the “Judgement Seat” of Christ when the righteous stand before Him and is consistent with the teaching of Jesus in Luke 6:37, “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not and ye shall not be condemned: forgive and ye shall be forgiven.” For those who are forgiven there can be no condemnation. And in John 5:24 Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment (*krisis*); but is passed from death unto life.” No condemnation and no judgment! The Apostle Paul also was inspired to write “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1).

Let us see how all this compares or contrasts with standard Christadelphian teaching which states, for example, that -

“When Christ returns, he will assemble all those who are responsible to judgment, living and dead. The dead he will bring from their graves; the living he will gather by his angels. They must all appear before his judgment seat that they may receive through the body according to what they have done in this present life. All who know the truth, whether they submit to it or refuse, are responsible to judgement. There are many who are not responsible for it is light that makes responsible. Darkness covers the earth, and where there is darkness, sin is not imputed. Those who are not responsible die and pass out of memory, as if they had never been. The righteous among the responsible will receive immortal nature. Their mortal bodies will be changed in a moment by the power of the Spirit of God. Those whom Christ rejects will depart from his presence with shame and vexation, at last to be devoured by the second death.”

This picture of a tribunal at the Judgment Seat of Christ cannot be sustained from Scripture because the teaching that the righteous are responsible for judgment at Christ’s return contradicts Christ and Paul, and the belief that the unrighteous will stand before His judgement seat at His appearing is also contrary to Scripture.

The Second Death.

What could be clearer than Revelation 20:6? “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” Nowhere does Scripture say the righteous will be judged with the unrighteous. But it does tell us the righteous will be given life while the unrighteous will not have part in the first resurrection. Their judgment comes a thousand years later, followed by the second death, the last enemy that shall be destroyed – 1 Corinthians 15:25.

So why is it that some believe in the possibility of being condemned when they appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ? There can be no contradiction in Scripture. Such belief must be the result of misunderstanding.

“But Few Chosen”

So when are “the few” judged? Will it be at the Judgment Seat of Christ? We say, no, not at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

In the New Testament there is continual exhortation to serve God perfectly. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind... and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self” - Matthew 22:37 and 39, and Jesus supersedes, or intensifies this by - “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” - John 13:34. Jesus is asking for perfection of faith and obedience.

“But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23, 24). These are Jesus’ friends who “do whatsoever I command you.”

But who can claim perfect obedience apart from Jesus? Perhaps no one. However, failure to “do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14) brings judgment in the form of chastisement. Through Moses Israel was told, in Deuteronomy 8:5, “Thou shalt consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God shall chasten thee.” (These thoughts are enlarged in Hebrews 12:5-11).

The Psalmist found, “The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.” (Psalm 118:18); and in Proverbs 3:11 we read, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction.” Again, Jesus gives the same message in Revelation 3:19, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.” Paul explains more when he says, in 1 Corinthians 11:32, “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” Let me repeat that: - “When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” This surely is very clear and its importance is obvious. If we are chastened of the Lord here and now, there can be no future condemnation to those in Christ, as Jesus Himself affirms in John 3:18. “He that believeth on him is not condemned (judged against).”

So why do the faithful appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ? They appear before Jesus to receive their rewards according to what they have done, as explained in the parable of the talents.

They are justified by faith, and on the grounds of faith are raised immortal.

They have shown their faith by their works, for which they are rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Resurrection of the Righteous

It is now only necessary that we briefly look at this by quoting from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians.

“As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming... But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die... So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” - from 1 Corinthians 15:22- 23 & 35 to 44.

There is no need to manipulate these words of Paul to fit another’s interpretation. The meaning is plain and should be accepted as it reads.

Sin in the flesh

We can not leave this subject without pointing out the fact that nowhere does scripture say that our flesh is judged or condemned. It is the person who is judged according to his or her character, not according to their flesh. It is the person who is counted righteous or unrighteous and condemned as the case may be. The literal flesh is not counted righteous or unrighteous. The teaching of sin in the flesh makes utter nonsense of this subject of judgment and should not be suffered.

Jesus condemned sin in the same way as Noah condemned the people of his day. Hebrews 11:7 - “Noah... prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” Likewise Jesus prepared salvation for His house, when He suffered for us in the flesh, by the which He condemned the world for their sin, when in flesh identical to ours He proved perfect obedience and righteousness was possible and sinners without excuse.

We conclude with Peter’s exhortation in 2 Peter 3:10-14,

“But the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall

be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

Brother Russell Gregory

In our last Circular Letter Brother Phil Parry wrote concerning “the man in Luton” to whom we sent a copy for his information. He, the man from Luton, Peter Gumm, wrote the following letter in reply:

June 18th 2004

“Dear Mr. Parry,

Although I have neither spoken nor written to you, I am very gravely concerned over the false reports in ‘Your May/June Magazine’, (which from that angle I am glad has been sent to me), with statements on pages 9 & 10, and above your name, related to “the man in Luton “; statements which are completely incorrect and untrue, and which I trust you will speedily and openly acknowledge is a false statement by you, and that you will revoke and put right, in the very next issue of your Magazine, please.

You infer “the man in Luton” considers Dr. Thomas was a false prophet, and the Christadelphians ‘never had the Truth, and never did have the Holy Spirit’!!!; that is an utterly false statement, a lie and prevarication, and is farthest from “The Truth” as is ever possible, particularly as “the man in Luton “ has never even written to you. I am asking you to honourably take back every word of what you have said, without reserve, in your next issue, please.

Firstly, one cannot fail to believe that Doctor Thomas was certainly a man ‘raised up’ and guided by the Holy Spirit, — and one quotes a Statement in a booklet on Heresies accordingly:-

“By the year 1850, through the grace of God “The Truth” was unearthed from the accumulated rubbish of human tradition, by John Thomas. The discovery of that valuable pearl so filled this assiduous student with gratitude, that neither the onslaught of tradition-mongers, nor the supercilious contempt of those who profited in the camp of the unfaithful, could move him.”

Secondly, you falsely state that, “the man in Luton” says that the Christadelphians have not the Holy Spirit and never did have it. “Doctor Thomas chose the name “Christadelphian” (Brethren in Christ) and certainly held The Truth then. When the brotherhood had to make a stand over Military Service, they had the Holy Spirit guidance at that time. However they certainly did not have the Holy Spirit, as did the Apostles, and they upon whom they laid their hands.

No Christadelphian, at any time however has possessed the power of the Holy Spirit to cure physical disabilities or mental illness, to speak with tongues; to take up serpents, drink any deadly thing and not be hurt; lay hands on the sick for them to recover; or raise the dead.!!, (as certain prophets, the Lord Jesus, and the apostles were able to). That is a different issue altogether.

Sadly, beginning only some sixteen years after the setting forth of “The Truth” by Dr Thomas, by stages, divisions came to manifest the approved; certain forsook “The Faith” and thus fellowship had to be severed. Divisions followed over heresies related to - a personal Devil and Hell - the nature of Christ - immortality of the soul - the Scriptures only partly inspired - non-responsibility of enlightened rejecters - yoking with unbelievers - matters of marriage with aliens - Divorce - of business partnerships, trade unions, Co-operative Societies, Friendly Societies - smoking and ‘drinking’ - of not having radios (& as it would have been, Television), joining to the world - Fairs &. Theatres - of Conscientious objection to Military

Service and a 'Brother representing all Christadelphian sections before the authorities, notwithstanding their separation (!) and the matter of taking oaths, - matters of 'dress', of Sisters clothing, to be of modest apparel covering the flesh, (and not wearing trousers, as pertaining to the man, Deut. 22v5), of Sisters cutting (shearing) of the hair and not wearing a covering for their head, (1 Corinthians 11), (Mary did not shear her hair, given her for a glory and was able to dry the feet of her Lord with it.) -" of Sisters speaking in the Ecclesia, or for the Ecclesia. (1 Corinthians 14 v 14 - 36) the woman to learn in silence. I suffer not a woman to teach !!! (1 Timothy 2 v 8 - 14) - of laxity and weariness even of the solemn assembly, (missing the Breaking of Bread, on the First Day of the week, if it suits one), and of Laodiceanism and so on. I notice you appear to have two or three 'women' 'teaching' among you!!

Thus, a little while prior to the division of those who separated from the "Christadelphians" to re-establish The Ecclesia of Christ, a Brother wrote that the time may well come for "a few names" who had endeavoured to live up to the Highway of The Truth the Way of Holiness, to repudiate that [once] worthy name which hitherto they had espoused. That Brother died shortly before that Division.

"The man in Luton" has not inherited any of the wrong views and errors of Christadelphianism.

Now, in the issue of Christ's nature. Jesus was the Lamb of the flock, which Abel saw offered the best of his life, the fat. Jesus was the Seed of the woman and crushed the reasoning of the Serpent, (called Devil, opposing God, and Satan (an Adversary) to Eve and Adam), in his head (as the example after his Baptism, crushing its three suggestions in his head as the thoughts arose in his mind and saying 'Thou shall not') - thus it behoved (was necessary, essential) that he [Jesus] be made like unto his brethren ~ the serpent of brass was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness to show one in whom God's laws had been allowed to work to destroy the working of the ways of the flesh, so that all who 'looked' upon it might be saved from the serpents bite bringing death.

Jesus likened this to himself (John 3 v 14-15) " he was born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law" - because he did not sin, transgress - but Jesus had our condemned nature - he could not raise himself from the Tomb, but 'God was not to leave him in hell', (sheol, the grave) and as Jesus had not sinned (transgressed) ~ as the wages of sin is death, and as Jesus had not sinned, neither was iniquity found in his lips, he had done nothing worthy of the sentence of death.

He had power (Greek; liberty, freedom) to lay his life down, but said, "not my will, but Thine be done ". When Christ gave the Emblems at the last Passover, he said "This is my Body" - of the same nature as the flock, but without a Spot or a Blemish in character, as was seen in all the offerings, in the types under the Law) "offered for you for the remission of sin."

When he had completed his sacrifice for the sins of others, God raised him the third day so that God would not suffer His holy one to see corruption. Psalm 16 v 8 - 11. He was given a change of nature to immortality (Zech. 3), during that same First Day of his resurrection.

That day God had first begotten him of a new nature, given immortality. Christ the First-fruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming, to rule the world for a thousand years, in righteousness and universal peace, to the Glory of God.

It was essential that he be made like unto his brethren. Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise took part of the same ... (Heb. 2 v 14-18) - "He took not on the nature of angels... in all things it behoved (was necessary for) him to be made like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest to God [after the Order of Melchizedek] in things pertaining to God, in making reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself suffered being tempted (tried), He was able to succour them that are tempted.

If you try to say Christ was not of our nature you completely deny him of his triumph over our nature, which is ever at enmity against God, and you deny him of his victory. Could any convict him of sin, - transgressing God's Laws.

The Apostle John says, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves... Whoso abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

This is "The Truth" as saith the Scriptures.

Yours truly and sincerely,

(signed) Peter F.J.Gumm.

* * *

In response to the above letter Brother Phil Parry wrote as follows:

Dear Mr Gumm, Greetings in Messiah's Name.

4th July 2004

I thank you for your letter of June 18th in which you accuse me of stating certain inferences and facts from what you have said in application to Edward Turney by relating falsely his views to the words of 1 John 1:1-3 concerning the coming of Christ in the flesh, a flesh E.Turney believed as did Dr Thomas, was the same physical quality of "very good" nature in which Adam was created and also before he transgressed in Eden and afterwards.

In pointing this out to be the view of Dr Thomas in 1855 (Herald of the Kingdom and Coming Age) and in 1869 including Robert Roberts, that "There was no physical change in the nature of Adam when he transgressed nor evidence in Scripture to that effect," to which view E.Turney was in agreement, you then accuse Turney of being a false prophet by reason of the fact that Robert Roberts changed his own view to a false and unscriptural one of changed and defiled flesh different from the "living soul" God created.

My inference was that if Edward Turney was a false prophet yet in agreement with Dr Thomas, it makes the Dr also a false prophet on the nature of Jesus whereas R.Roberts is the guilty one. A false prophet therefore does not bring Truth to light neither preach it or have the Holy Spirit, and the followers would also be in that position so what I was inferring was that on the subject of the nature of man Thomas and Turney were right.

I am sorry Mr Gumm, but this puts you and your members as followers and believers of the lie invented by Robert Roberts for had you read the history of what happened between R.Roberts and E.Turney in 1873 and read thoroughly the Turney Lecture "The Sacrifice of Christ" you would have felt ashamed to follow the views of the man who wrote "The Slain Lamb" in reply, and later was instrumental in compiling the Christadelphian Statement of Faith, the clauses of which have caused all the trouble and with which I find you and your members in agreement at least on doctrine, yet you refuse in your letter to me to admit it.

Nowhere in Genesis does it support Roberts and his Clause V "That Adam broke God's law and was adjudged unworthy of immortality and sentenced to return to the ground from whence he was taken, a sentence which defiled and became a physical law of his being and was transmitted to all his posterity."

I find you in agreement with this and am amazed that you cannot see that an already corruptible nature destined to die if left to itself as God created it (see Dr.Thomas in Eureka, Volume 1, page 248) needed to be changed to that same nature already capable of dying. Talk of blindness in part happening to Israel! How can you believe that God condemned the very good nature He had created when in fact we are told He condemned Adam's sin because he was capable in that nature of remaining sinless? Adam sinned in his very good nature, Jesus was sinless in conduct in that very nature in which Adam sinned; why condemn the nature and change it to something worse in the Robert's theory of things and thereby repudiate the Wisdom of God?

The nature in which Adam transgressed was "very good." Dr.Thomas wrote, "Sin had to be condemned in the nature which transgressed." Jesus condemned sin by His conduct, it was not condemned

by His having sin in His flesh or body and destroy it on Calvary and thereby (as taught in Christadelphian literature) destroy the Devil.

Your continued emphasis of the necessity of Christ coming in the same nature of His brethren indicates agreement with them. What a web of confused doctrine and tradition you have been caught up in! I feel sorry because there are so few who have entered in at the strait gate.

You quote Job "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Then you speak of Mary offering for her uncleanness according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:2-6) alluding to her physical nature as unclean but the child she brought forth which had no character, neither the lamb of the flock, you refer to as without spot and without blemish or any such thing, so if Mary's nature was unclean (which you infer) was her nature changed to a superior one after she had complied with the Law of Moses?

St. Paul taught in Romans chapter 8 that the "law of the Spirit of Life in Christ hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Proving the legal state of Paul, not his physical condition from which he had not been made free.

We of the Nazarene faith have contended earnestly for years with the confused views of the Roberts element of Christadelphia and have sent out literature for their benefit, not our own, and your views being so similar to theirs do not surprise us on account that so many do not read it for the sake of Truth and the salvation revealed to those who sincerely seek it.

In conclusion: I could write more to convict you of error though I would rather compliment you for any Truth you could or may embrace as a result of our correspondence, especially as with the Christadelphians in general, you do not see the difference between the death common to Adam and all creation and the death as a legal sentence that came by sin involving the shedding of blood. True, you had not written to me before, but all the above derived from your letters to my friend and also "The Household of Faith" declaration booklets, it being your personal views. You ask me "to honourably take back every word of what I have said without reserve, in your next issue please."

If I did this I would dishonour the Truth my Heavenly Father has revealed to me, and have shown by inference in this letter E.Turney confirming the truth of my opposition to Christadelphian error and your own.

Please read 1 Corinthians 12: the Holy Spirit and its gifts did not die with the Apostles and remember "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," not people of condemned nature. Therefore in view of your reply and I assume zeal for truth, I remain Yours respectfully and in anticipation of the appearance of the Lord from Heaven.

Philip Parry.

Extract from a letter from Sister Audrey Bundy:-

"I have just been reading John Stevenson's letter in the CL and there are a couple of points I don't agree with. Firstly I don't agree with him that there were others apart from the twelve at the last supper. Both Mark and Luke speak of the twelve. Mark 14vs.17-18 "And in the evening he cometh with the twelve and as they sat and did eat..." Luke 22v.14 "And when the hour was come he sat down and the twelve apostles were with him." No mention of any others.

This was a special supper for them in which he told them what would happen and gave them instructions what they should do after his resurrection. We have a memorial service each week in remembrance of our Lord.

The next point is that John can't see anything wrong in breaking bread and drinking wine with those who have different beliefs. If it doesn't matter what we believe as individuals why were we separated from

brethren and sisters and those we loved. We could have stayed and just had our own thoughts. Why have we spent years in isolation if it doesn't matter what we believe. Why did your father and others spend so much time and effort trying to help Christadelphians know the real truth about the atonement and all its implications.

I spoke to one of the elders of the Christadelphian ecclesia I attended and said if Christ had sinful flesh then the bread and wine which we partake of must be a polluted offering, to which he replied "yes I suppose they must." This was what finally decided my mother, father, husband and myself to leave the Christadelphians. Not of course that we had much choice when we told them we didn't believe that Christ had to die for his own sinful flesh.

With the help of Ernest's writings and of course others I came to a proper understanding of why Christ died and everything fell into place. So simple when one has the right key. I will be ever grateful to those who helped me to see things more clearly. Why I was chosen to have this better understanding when there are many who I feel are more worthy than I am I will never know, but the calling came and how thankful I am to be so privileged.

We are also told that except ye be born again you can in no wise enter the Kingdom of God. This means baptism into our Lord's death, buried with him in baptism. This doesn't mean a sprinkling of water as babies it is complete immersion in water, when we are no longer sons and daughters of Adam but sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. If we haven't been baptised then we are still in Adam, no matter how good a life we lead we cannot go against what is written in the word of God.

John also asks why did God allow errors of translation to occur in our English bibles. He could ask why does God allow wars, why do the young have to die, why does he allow people to be tortured. One could go on asking why. As we know we were given free will and the only answer I could give John would possibly be to make us search more diligently for the truth.

Steve Cooper says, much literature which crosses his path seems to be obsessed with the doctrine of Christadelphians who aren't listening, rather than preaching the Gospel to a needy wider world. In my view he has a point. Christadelphians in the main don't want to know although I and several others have heeded the efforts of those like your Dad.

Sister Audrey Bundy.

Some Interesting Thoughts arising from Circular Letter 207 for May/June 2004

Sister Helen's Editorial was very good especially in showing the contrasting motivations and moods of Saul the strict and unregenerate Pharisee, and the regenerated Paul the aged, having become ever mindful and thankful to God for the love, grace and favour bestowed upon him through the merits of Jesus whose way he had opposed but whose unselfish love he was now emulating by faith and works. Onesiphorus being an example (2 Timothy 1:16-18 & 2 Timothy 4:19).

Whether this is the same Onesiphorus described by Sister Helen from the information she derived from a certain source I could not be sure, but the description could only be given by one very familiar with Paul as the above quotations show.

Regarding Brother John Stevenson's views about fellowship we know that apart from Jesus there is no better written authority concerning the basis for fellowship than what is stated by those apostles and teachers who were given authority in the work and ministry for the perfecting of the saints - "unto the measure and the stature of the fullness of Christ" - "in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." - Ephesians 4:10-16.

In defining ourselves Nazarenes, our basis of fellowship includes the important fact that Jesus came in the identical flesh and blood in which Adam was created. St Paul taught this truth in Acts 17:26-, "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth..." Edward Turney believed this and quoted it. St Paul's fellow apostle John believed and taught it, and that those who believed otherwise were anti-Christ and should not be received into our house. - 2 John 10.

The children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt received a similar message as it could become a snare and a departure from the knowledge of the true God. Jesus said "And this is life eternal to know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." The Epistles of John teach much about fellowship and I feel the Nazarenes know more of what qualifies fellowship with the Father and His Son than the many cults, sects and divided denominations of the world. Therefore the prerogative is theirs to decide who is in fellowship with the Father and the Son in the doctrinal sense, followed by faith and works to qualify fellowship and love.

It is written "In the latter days some shall depart from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." (1 Timothy 4:1). It is obvious one must have the true faith in order to depart from it, yet many in these latter times who held the true faith have been cast out and isolated for such a reason, by failing to be seduced by doctrines of men. We are expected as servants of God to love Him with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves but this does not mean we should tolerate their idolatrous practices and false theories received by handed down traditions. We are therefore in a position of separation required by our heavenly Father, "Wherefore come ye out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing and I will be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord."

In doing so this is the position in which we are related and placed. "Beloved now are we the sons of God" says John, this signifying that beforehand there was no relationship with God.

Now if Brother John Stevenson finds himself by choice in such a position and must partake of our Lord's body and blood in symbol as a memorial of His supreme sacrifice and discernment of its meaning and finds no one in his vicinity that does for sure, why complain of partaking alone? We would all like to partake with others of the same views on the death by sin Jesus suffered in the place of Adam (not natural decay), by the shedding of blood, and we try to express our views on the subject but if people do not see it or will not accept it we do not have to compromise on the basis of superficial knowledge others may express.

The sacrificial willing death by infliction of Jesus is central to the doctrine of the Atonement therefore natural death by decay cannot be involved seeing it was already an appointment of the Creator and is not even recorded in Genesis as the penalty for Adam's sin.

Whether our Brother John made the Elders of the Church of Christ in Australia aware of this he does not state, but the Elders' two requirements, Belief that the Bible was the Word of God and that Jesus was our Saviour sounds rather superficial to me seeing there are many divisive denominations who express the same superficial view.

I can appreciate Brother John's feelings that when eating the Bread and drinking the Wine of Memorial of Christ's sacrifice that, like Elijah wrongly thought, he is the only one left to qualify in such a superior position when God proved otherwise. We accept there are many people who exhibit love and good works in daily life but this does not mean they are sons and daughters of God which is why we appreciate the Love and Grace of God in having called us from darkness to light in accordance with His will and purpose. None of us know about people in the world who may constitute a part of the remnant in Christ Jesus but they are known to God and we who are in Christ Jesus are exhorted by the Apostle John, when in doubt, to try the spirits whether they are of God. We can all sympathise with our fellows of like faith living in isolation but can be assured by the words of Jesus in Luke 4:25-27, "Many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when there was no rain for three and a half years and great famine in the land, but unto none of them was Elijah sent but unto Sarepta a city of Sidon unto a woman that was a widow. Likewise many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian. The lesson to learn then is that God is mindful of those who have respect for Him and by faith in His Word please Him and commit themselves to His judgment.

Reverting to Brother John's mention of the Breaking of Bread service he calls it the Lords supper but this is not so in the strict sense because the supper Jesus partook of was the Passover Lamb celebrating the coming of Israel out of Egypt; admitted Paul calls this the Lord's supper and shows a distinction between this and what Jesus introduced for the memorial of His sacrificial death – 1 Corinthians 11:20-26. Also Luke in chapter 22 verses 14 to 20 speaks of Jesus eating with the twelve apostles but not drinking of the fruit of the vine and telling them it was shed for them, not for Himself.

Brother John on page 25 of the Circular Letter says he has a question to put to you all - "Why did God allow errors of mistranslation to occur in English Bibles which perpetrate Roman Catholic fallacies and have misled millions?" The answer to this is countered by many other questions which must not doubt that God has allowed freedom of choice for belief and faith in the word He has spoken to His servants who were moved by His Holy Spirit. Translation is the work of men not wholly inspired, yet where it is correct and logically and reasonably understood I could ask the question - "Why did God allow the plain teaching of the book of Genesis to be misinterpreted by R.Roberts and has caused millions to believe Adam was something other than a living soul by Creation subject to decay and death yet by sin committed, being changed to the same nature as a penalty? To see the simple teaching of God's Word here does not necessitate any manipulation for its understanding. We are aware that much of the Holy Scriptures are written in such a way to be seen as metaphorical and as a treasure hidden below the surface to be found with the help of the clues given. Jesus said, Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." So in effect there must first be the desire to know why God has caused His Word to be recorded in such a way and to the advantage of those who will not tire of digging for such treasure which is for their salvation.

We find a good example of metaphorical teaching in the book of Isaiah especially the eleventh chapter which I have regarded only in a literal sense in reference to the beasts of the field. But knowing that the creatures mentioned have no knowledge of God as human beings do of higher intelligence, I believe it must refer to a state of peace and assurance brought about among opposing parties through the effect of Righteousness. As stated in verse 9 "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

We all look forward to that glorious time when the work of Righteousness will be peace and the effect of Righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this. Isaiah 32:17.

With united Love to all, Phil and Rene

Eric Phipps takes up The Challenge issued in our booklet "To The Law and To The Testimony"

Dear Russell Gregory,

Herewith my response to your re-issue of your challenge to my beliefs, as a Christadelphian. This speaks for itself. May I add that whilst I do not doubt your sincerity I deplore your insinuation that we are a lot of sycophantic followers of men unable to think and analyse for ourselves; accepting our religion ready made. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Eric W.Phipps,

Eric's Response:

For many months now we have been in receipt of pamphlets and reprints of addresses issued by the Nazarene Fellowship in support of your doctrinal beliefs, particularly in regard to the nature of man in

general and to Jesus Christ in particular and its bearing upon the sacrifice of Christ and its efficacy in relation to our salvation from sin and death.

So sure are you that Christadelphians in general are wrong in respect of these two vital matters that you have re-issued a challenge to prove our beliefs, insinuating that whilst we claim the infallibility and inspiration of the Scriptures upon which we base our teaching, in fact this teaching is, you claim, partly truth and partly tradition 'accepting our religion ready made as a legacy from brethren dead and gone.' This sordid imputation which runs through your literature is of course referring to brethren John Thomas and Robert Roberts, especially the latter whom you particularly castigate in language which betrays both your hatred and ignorance whilst at the same time placing your own confidence in large measure upon the flawed expositions of Edward Turney and Ernest Brady.

For the purpose of this response to this challenge we rely entirely on the Scriptures without reference to the writings of others leaving that, if need be, to another occasion.

We write entirely on our own responsibility without recourse to anyone but our own knowledge and understanding of the inspired Word of God gained over a period of more than 65 years as a Christadelphian.

We will deal with this challenge to the specific articles of my Faith seriatim as also the comments made in the rest of the pamphlet:-

1). That the nature of Adam was changed after he sinned

This assertion of our belief is not in accord with the truth we believe and teach. The Divine record in the second chapter of Genesis makes clear Adam was formed by God from the dust of the ground, that the breath of life was breathed into his nostrils and he became a living soul. In that original state (fearfully and wonderfully made) he was pronounced to be "very good." But he was not perfect. It is evident throughout the Scriptures that God takes His highest pleasure from the voluntary obedience of His children in which regard both Adam and Eve had to be put to the proof. Granted the privilege of free-will above all other of the animate creation they had the responsibility of its exercise which would recognise both the supremacy of their Creator and their own dependence and therefore subservience to Him. In their pristine state therefore and prior to being tested in this vital matter it is evident that their nature must allow for either obedience or disobedience. So it was that they were created corruptible but not then corrupting.

When put to the proof in the manner which God in His wisdom chose by the giving to them a simple command, they disobeyed and transgressed the Divine law. The serpent beguiled Eve through the subtlety of its reasoning which was contrary to the Will of God and her mind was corrupted from the simplicity of the Law of God and that of Adam followed the same course. Taking the mind of the Serpent, making that mind their mind which was at enmity with God, it introduced into their thinking an alien element which transformed their minds both then and thereafter and became a dominating evil influence. It was the cause of their transgression; was obnoxious to God and was itself Sin in its causal form.

It introduced, by their voluntary choice, an element which formed no part of the original state of our first parents. So it was that they fell from that "very good" condition to one which was morally corrupt. The edict of God that "in the day thou eatest thereof dying thou shalt die" began its fatal process. Having by the exercise of their own free-will become morally corrupt so the punishment stated beforehand (so that they were without excuse) was a physical corruption which began immediately upon transgression.

Their original nature therefore in the physical sense was not changed after Adam and Eve sinned. But there was this difference. Created corruptible they became corrupting. That which lay dormant awaiting the outcome of a proving process became activated. Moreover their relationship with their Creator became estranged. No longer 'en rapport' with Him in mind through the Elohim with whom they conversed in the paradise they inhabited they were driven physically from it and barred re-entry into it. Such was the evidence of God's displeasure and abhorrence at their fallen estate not forgetting the other entails of evil which ensued both upon Eve and Adam. The effects of the working of the serpent mind are seen throughout the history of mankind from that first transgression to our own day its insidious operation ever more subtle, evil and at enmity with God.

The foregoing is what true Christadelphians believe and the proofs put forward by the Nazarene Fellowship are irrelevant although true in their context.

2). That Jesus Christ was Sinful Flesh

This simplistic assertion of our belief has to be viewed in the light of our forgoing remarks regarding the fall of man and the reasons for it.

The writer to the Hebrews in chapter 2 verse 14 states concerning Jesus Christ “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy that having the power of death that is the devil (diabolos).”

Here is inspired evidence that our Lord was made exactly the same as those He came to save. Moreover we are given the reason for that fact. He came, we are told, to destroy by His own death the diabolos which he like all mankind possessed in himself. What then is this ‘devil’, this diabolos he destroyed? The answer is found in the etymology of the word. It is a noun which, in the Greek has the primary meaning of that which crosses over or causes to cross over. It corresponds to the Latin word transgress (trans - cross, gress - a point fixed). That is what Adam did. He crossed over the point fixed by God. The cause was the power of the mind of that “old serpent the devil.” So Jesus by inheritance from His mother, being therefore of our nature possessed this power of death along with all humanity. It is the power of sin which in its operation brings death for that is its wages - the edict of God.

But because God was his Father, Jesus also inherited from Him a moral capacity and strength which, by its development from a child, he not only overcame this diabolos whilst he was living so that he never transgressed, but voluntarily destroyed it by taking it in his own body to Calvary where it was crucified.

In so making manifest by this sacrifice God’s righteousness in its condemnation so the justice of God demanded the resurrection from the dead of this representative man, for that which he destroyed was inherited and not his responsibility. It was not possible therefore for the grave to be holden of him, so he was raised the third day according to the Scriptures to a newness of life.

Moreover his great sacrifice laid the foundation by which men could by baptism into his name, come to God through him, become a member of a multitudinous Christ and in due time share that eternal life when he which is now his, without compromise. Such is the wonder of God’s condescension to fallen man in His provision for their eternal well being. His love, mercy and indeed all the attributes of His character were made manifest in Christ Jesus.

Now in the proof to the contrary put forward by those challenging the forgoing truth, they in fact prove its veracity.

The first Scripture referred to is 1 John chapter 3 verse 6 (although the quote is found in verse 5) “And in him is no sin.” A careful intelligent reading of the context of this statement of the apostle John makes clear that it refers to Jesus following his sacrifice, his death and resurrection and points forward to his second coming. Verse 2 reads “we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is (now). Verse 5 reads “ye know that he was (past tense) manifest to take away our sins and in him is (present tense) no sin.” This is in perfect harmony with the writer to the Hebrews where in chapter 9 verses 26 and 28 we read “Now once in the end of the age (Mosaic) hath he (Jesus) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself... so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time (future) without sin unto salvation.” To which we might quite properly infer -having come the first time with sin in order to take it away!!

It has been said that a text taken out of context is a pretext and the error of the Nazarene Fellowship could not be more blatant because of failure to see the Truth in its fullness instead of across the surface.

Nor are the remaining 3 quotations made under this second heading at all out of harmony with what we have written.

Christ as a sacrificial lamb was indeed without blemish and without spot. The whole point of his divine paternity was to produce a man made of a woman made under the law of sin and death but of such moral strength and purity to overcome the wiles of the devil. Jesus though of our nature was both a prodigy and a paragon in this regard. In all points tempted like as we are (the exercise of mind) yet without transgression, who did no sin (no transgression) neither was guile found in his mouth (the operation of mind) for he fought the battle between the carnal and the spiritual and won every conflict so that his actions were faultless.

3). That Jesus had to die to redeem himself.

We have in the statement of the foregoing scriptural facts already, in effect, answered this. Jesus as Hebrews 2:14 makes plain possessed the diabolos although it never possessed him. He destroyed it in himself conquering its innate power whilst he was living and then taking it in his own body to the tree where it was crucified, thus making manifest its utter abhorrence in the sight of God and revealing God's righteous judgment in its condemnation.

This was the sin which he along with all other members of the human race possessed by inheritance from birth. But this sin is not transgression. We must learn to distinguish. The apostle Paul in Romans chapter 7 makes this clear. In verse 18 he states: "For I know that in me, that is in my flesh (the fleshly tablet of the heart - the brain) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me but how to perform that which is good I find not... Now if I do that I would not it is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me." Now this sin is not transgression but it is the cause of it. It is in fact the diabolos - that which causes to cross over the law of God.

So it was as Hebrews 9:12 confirms that Jesus by his own blood entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption. The word "obtained" is, in the Greek, in the reflexive voice and refers to himself. Nothing could be clearer; the words "for us" are not in the original.

That his sacrifice was, in the purpose of God, also for us is very true. We have already stated in our reply to item 2 that our Lord's sacrifice laid the foundation by which as our representative we could by baptism (with all the doctrinal significance of that ordinance) become part of a multitudinous Christ and obtain salvation from sin and death in and through him. So that the scriptural references referred to (and many more) are very true. But let it be remembered that his great sacrifice was first for himself (for the reasons given) that it might be for us.

4). That we do not know whether our sins are forgiven

By faith we believe that our sins are forgiven for the reasons stated in the scriptural references given. But there are conditions attached to this forgiveness:

- a. As we forgive those who trespass against us, as Matthew 11:25 implies.
- b. If we continue in the faith grounded and settled. - Colossians 1:23 and context.

Any implication that our sins upon confession of them are forgiven regardless of conditions can lead to the heresy of immortal emergence from the grave for what need is there for the judgment seat and our appearance before it? But there must be an abandonment of sin by the means provided namely the power of the Word of Life, following the example of our Master Where we fail because of our fallen estate then upon confession our sins are forgiven in his name and for his sake. He is our Mediator and High Priest, interceding on our behalf.

Christadelphian contradictions

Like the bowling alley where skittles are set up only to be knocked down so the writer of the Challenge bowls along with statements made by our pioneer brethren (mainly taken out of context) in order to show their seeming contradictions. The reality however reveals their existence only in the minds of those whose whole house is but a house of cards.

Where an edifice is erected upon false premises so it cannot stand when the force of Truth beats upon it.

Begin by believing that man was created a corrupting mortal being. Continue by assuming that transgression of God's law demanded an immediate condign violent death, put that aside by providing a substitute, assume that substitute to be free from such punishment, go on to believe that the substitute lay down his life instead of the transgressors by a violent death in order to satisfy the supposed legalities of the situation and there you have, in brief, the doctrinal teaching of the Nazarene Fellowship.

It is totally unscriptural having no foundation in fact. It impugns the perfect character of God as made manifest in all His attributes, particularly His Righteousness and Justice.

On the other hand get the foundations firmly set as we have scripturally but briefly stated and there are no contradictions all is in complete harmony and balance.

Moreover the Love, Mercy and condescension of God to fallen mankind are made manifest by His provision of the "only begotten of the Father" our Saviour, Redeemer and Friend.

So for the rest of the pamphlet we are content to view the substance of it in the light of the Word of God which we have demonstrated. It makes plain the Truth and enables us by the exercise of it to discern between that which is true and that which is false. By such a process the teachings of the Nazarene Fellowship is but a grasping in the darkness of fiction and error. It is a deceptive doctrine concerning the sacrifice of Christ of which the apostle John in his second epistle warns us to beware.

Eric Phipps.

* * *

My reply to Eric Phipps

Dear Eric,

Thank you for taking up the Challenge in our booklet "To The Law and To The Testimony". We are, of course, genuinely concerned about the Christadelphian views you express, because we believe them to be based on assumptions. We know no one wants to hear this regarding their understanding of the Bible but what else can we say?

Under the heading (1) of your response you say of Adam and Eve, "So it was they were created corruptible but not corrupting." We agree that they were made corruptible, but being made "very good" does not mean they were not corrupting. It means they were made "very good" for the purpose God had in mind. Which applies to everything in Creation, and naturally ageing bodies for Adam and Eve suited God's purpose perfectly.

To say their bodies were not ageing as time went by and to say the ageing process was triggered by disobedience are assumptions because Scripture does not say these things.

You assume that "the edict of God that 'in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die' began its fatal process." But Scripture does not say so.

You say "That which lay dormant awaiting the outcome of a proving process became activated." But Scripture does not say so.

Regarding the serpent; the language you use makes it well nigh impossible to understand what the serpent is. I know you do not believe in a personal devil though Scripture talks of "that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan," yet you seem to be saying that the serpent had a mind of its own which Adam and Eve took to be their mind. And you add "taking the mind of the serpent introduced an element which formed no part of the original state of our first parents." But again Scripture does not say so.

While the Bible doesn't state any of the above; they are all assumptions and are the faulty premises upon which Christadelphians adduce their teachings regarding sin in the flesh, Jesus having to die for Himself and mortal resurrection etc., etc.

Now I want to quote two sentences from your letter as follows:

“Taking the mind of the serpent, making that mind their mind which was at enmity with God, it introduced into their thinking an alien element which transformed their minds both then and thereafter and became a dominating evil influence. It was the cause of their transgression; was obnoxious to God and was itself Sin in its causal form.”

I ask how do you know? Why cannot your thoughts be expressed in simple language? Wouldn't it be so much easier to say that God's Law gave Adam and Eve a choice and they chose the wrong course. This statement is true and scriptural.

In section 2) you quote Hebrews 2:14, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same; that through death he might destroy that having the power of death that is the devil (diabolos).” You ask “What is this ‘devil’ this diabolos he destroyed?” but you don't give any clear answer - something about that which “crosses over or causes to cross over” and “that is what Adam did. He crossed over the point fixed by God.” Why not simply say that Adam sinned when he was tempted? But the point is that Jesus didn't sin when He was tempted, so how did Jesus have this “crossing over” in Him? Sorry, but I find the terms anything but enlightening.

I think we must give our readers language they can understand and follow; language which gives the sense of what one means clearly and simply.

You quote correctly that Jesus was in all points tempted like as we are yet without transgression, and yet you claim “the whole point of his divine paternity was to produce a man... of such moral strength... to overcome the wiles of the devil.” This is simply not true, in fact it is a contradiction. If Jesus was given extra strength to overcome temptation then He was not tempted in all points like as we are. You cannot have it both ways.

In quoting Hebrews 9:12 “...having obtained eternal redemption” and leaving out the last two words, “for us” which appear in many Bibles makes no difference to our understanding of the verse. Daniel 9:26 tells us that “Messiah shall be cut off but not for himself.” We take that to mean what it says.

Your paragraph regarding Nazarene Fellowship teaching is almost correct but we would not use the word “mortal” when referring to Adam in “his pristine state.” We believe Adam became mortal when he transgressed, thus making mortality a legal matter.

Going back to where you quote “in the day thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die” I would have thought this matter had been dealt with beyond challenge, not only by the Nazarene Fellowship but by the Christadelphian “Shofar” magazine who dealt with it even more thoroughly showing that it cannot possibly mean a dying process but emphasised an immediate inflicted death.

I do not believe we can have a proper appreciation of what salvation means nor can we achieve a sound and correct understanding of the Atonement until we get rid of the notion that natural death is the wages of sin.

Russell.

It was suggested to me that we reprint the following extract of a letter which I wrote to Michael Ashton, Editor of "The Christadelphian" magazine as it is appropriate to other correspondence in this Circular Letter. This letter was part of ongoing correspondence between Michael Ashton and myself while still a Christadelphian at the time when I had misgivings about some of the correctness of Christadelphian teachings together with the failure of the Erdington Ecclesia to meet with me for discussion:

"There is just one point which, to me is so very important and I would be most grateful to receive your considered reply, and it is this - as there are many very sincere and earnest Brethren and Sisters who do not believe any change took place in Adam's flesh when he disobeyed God's command and ate of the forbidden tree, where does one turn to in the Scriptures for the infallible, unassailable and essential proof that Adam's flesh was changed in order to counter such beliefs? I find it very easy to express this view (of changed flesh) as an opinion but where is the necessary proof beyond all reasonable doubt that the change in Adam's flesh took place? I am sure you will understand when I say this matter has exercised my mind quite considerably of late and I feel I need help in finding the answers."

That letter was written in February 1988 and Michael Ashton failed to reply thus ending many months of amicable correspondence. In the succeeding 16 years I can confirm that, having extensively studied Christadelphian literature, I find they have never put forward any proof whatsoever that Adam's flesh was changed.

Russell Gregory

Letter from Brother Phil Parry:-

Dear Mr X,

What is wrong with temptation? Adam and Eve were created with certain desires such as the taste for food and the various flavours of the fruits of the trees and herbs of the ground for their existence and sustenance. All this was lawful and could not be styled sin. Therefore until they were forbidden to do certain things they were in a state of innocence which related to their conduct and character not the physical flesh wherein their character would be developed for the pleasure of the Creator.

Placed in the Garden of Eden they were placed under a law of prohibition which did not include sexual intercourse, in fact this was a direct injunction "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth," the desire to do so was already implanted in their "very good" nature for this purpose. When the Apostle James wrote of temptation he had in mind the temptation to do what was unlawful and evil in comparison with God who was not under any law and could not therefore be tempted with unlawful desires, being Spirit, not flesh and blood. James does not say lust is sin, but when unlawful lust hath conceived and finished its action of gestation, sin is brought forth like the birth of a babe but not seen as such but abstract breach of law with no change of flesh but a legal sentence of death. Adam was not deceived, so we cannot accuse him of lust of the flesh, but the woman being deceived was first in the transgression and when Adam accepted the fruit of the forbidden tree handed to him and ate of it, his was the greater sin.

Hence the real meaning and true understanding of Paul's word, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon, not into, all men for that (in whom) all have sinned." (Romans 5:12). How can anyone read into this that all men had committed sin personally under law, and decay and death became infused into their nature when at the time they had not even been born? Paul is here teaching what is demonstrated in Hebrews 7:4-10 concerning Levi paying tithes to Melchizedec while in the loins of Abraham when Melchizedec met him with bread and wine. So in like manner all in the loins of Adam were imputed by the Creator to have sinned while being members of his body or in his loins. This is known as the Federal Principle, Adam the Federal Head of imputed sinners in his loins, and Jesus the Federal Head of those who die with Him in symbolic baptism whereby in Him they are made the

righteousness of God. (See Romans 5:15-21). Sin and death reigns until you are in Christ when grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. Paul teaches no physical change here but a legal and moral one, a resurrection to life from the death that came by Adam's sin which Jesus suffered for him and all in his loins. This to be reckoned as living now unto God in newness of life free from the bondage of conclusion under Sin. (Galatians 3:21, 22). It also shows that the Law of Moses did not give Jesus life and that as a Son of God He was not concluded under Adam's sin. St. Paul, not Roberts and his followers, was ordained of God to preach these facts of Holy Scripture. (Galatians 1:11,12).

Certainly Jesus was born of a woman and made under the Law and as St Paul said, "The commandment was holy, just and good" - "but if righteousness come by the law then Christ is dead in vain." Why? Because Paul says in another Epistle, "It was a ministration of death." We ask how can this be of a law which was holy, just and good? St Paul's answer is in Romans 5:18-21, "The law entered that the offence might abound." What offence? The offence which took place in Eden, the sin of Adam, drawing attention to the righteousness of one, Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death by the shedding of His blood to pay the price of purchase of those concluded under sin, even the Law of sin and death, from which by Jesus Christ, St. Paul said he had already, in Christ, been freed.

An important point comes to mind to the doubters, "Jesus said to Martha" in the present tense and before His crucifixion, "I am the Resurrection and The Life," no need then for Him to have to die for Himself for all the ignorant and blasphemous reasons certain people entertain and teach in secret, not openly in lectures because it would be unpopular and discourage likely converts. I speak from experience.

Reverting to my previous comments on what the Law could not do without the mission and sacrifice of Christ, a reading of 2 Corinthians 3:6-18 would be beneficial and enlightening if read without the biased teaching of men who have manipulated the Word of God to fit subjects they do not understand, but even then it depends on prayer and revelation from God which I referred to concerning St Paul above - Galatians 1:11,12.

If the Bible is read effectively and accepted as a true record of the Creation, there would be no doubts about the nature of Adam, the nature of Jesus and of His brethren together with ourselves. The nature is corruptible capable of dying as appointed and ordained of God the Creator. This is what Dr. Thomas wrote in 1855 "Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come" and this was the Truth of the matter, but what he wrote later to the contrary is error. I have found with his writings we must on the basis of rightly dividing the Word of Truth by discrimination, sift the wheat from the chaff and one quality of wheat I and my fellow believers have taught as Truth and the basic meaning of Redemption through Jesus Christ, is written by Dr. Thomas in his book "Eureka" Vol. 1 page 20: "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 and the price or ransom paid the precious blood of the flesh through which the anointed Spirit was manifested, it is therefore styled the precious blood of Christ." See Peter 1:18.

It appears incredible that the Pioneer and originator of the name "Christadelphian" should be rejected by such in their teaching, it could be lack of knowledge and understanding of the subject for they think redemption to be a physical change of the body after the coming of Christ.

In conversation with a Christadelphian some years ago I was giving praise to what Jesus achieved being tempted and tried in all points as we are yet without sin in the identical physical nature of flesh and blood we also are partakers. He then accused me of putting Christ on a pedestal to which I retorted, "That was where He should have been." Then he said, "Jesus did not do it himself, it was all of God." From this we must conclude that in the words of Robert Roberts, my view of Jesus would make him a mere man which is exactly what I was contending and what E.Turney also contended with Roberts in 1873. Who is the party that portrays Jesus as a hybrid, part man and part God to give Him the necessary strength to overcome temptation? Not Edward Turney, not the so-called Clean Flesh heretics, but Robert Roberts himself and his followers who say Jesus was not in our nature but a hybrid, yet having at the same time a nature defiled and condemned, whereas Dr. Thomas stated He was in the same "very good" nature in which Adam and Eve could have been obedient but were not, and therefore sin could only be condemned by proving obedience was possible, this Jesus proved by His own conduct.

Yet Job is quoted, chapter 14, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” Not one in the physical sense. True. Why then do people expect themselves as being in an unclean Christ at baptism to be brought out clean? Why also refer to Mary’s uncleanness after the birth of Jesus and then after 30 days purification according to the Law declare her to be clean? Surely there was no physical change in her nature. And surely God declared the firstborn male to be holy unto Himself. (Numbers 3:13). So then how can people believe that God brought an unclean thing out of an unclean and claimed it His? Nowhere in Scripture does it teach that human flesh and blood is physically unclean but in the Christadelphian Creed No 5 it is taught and the importance of Divine Law is ignored. Jesus said to His disciples “Ye are clean but not all,” for He spoke of the action of Judas Iscariot which legally made him unrighteous (unclean) – not his flesh.

Some say Jesus was commanded of God to lay down His life. But Jesus said, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” “Therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” This was not a compulsion, it was a voluntary act. But what did He mean by “power to lay it down,” Do we need power to die? Many have died for their faith including the Prophets and the disciples of Jesus but their deaths had no power in the way Jesus had power. Again, John 17:1,2 - “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” His power involved His freedom from Sin’s claim that according to God’s will He was a fit sacrifice offered up for the Redemption and the forgiveness of sins to bring many sons (from an only begotten Son) unto glory.

Let us hear the conclusion of the matter from the great expounder of the meaning of the Law and the Gospel of salvation to both Jew and Gentile who accept Jesus died for them and not for Himself:

“He that spared not His own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?” Romans 8:32.

Thanks be to God for His Love, Mercy and Grace. Amen.

P.Parry, (Nazarene).

We continue with extracts from

THE DEVIL AND HELL OF THE BIBLE

The Megiddo Mission Church

CHAPTER SEVEN

RESISTING THE DEVIL

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,” commanded the practical James (4:7). Who or what is this “devil”? Can we identify him? Is he a real corporeal enemy?

If on D-day during world war 2 the Allied forces landing on the beachhead of Normandy had found no enemy, met no opposition, what a strange situation it would have been! Or, to make the metaphor still more ridiculous, if they knew nothing about the type of fighting men they were to encounter, nothing of their armaments, or their ability to fight, nothing of their manoeuvrability or their possible war strategy, what a predicament they would have been in!

But that is just the position we are in today in our religious life if the theory of much of the religious world were true. We have been made familiar with one feature of the devil of popular belief. He is

sometimes said to be heavily armed but we have never been shown one piece of his armament. He is said to have a personality of his own, but we have never seen so much as one hair of his head. He must have a voice, for he is said to go about as a roaring lion “seeking whom he may devour,” but we have never so much as heard a faint whisper in our ear at any time during our entire lives.

History states that Martin Luther thought he was familiar with the devil, that he “lived in constant consciousness of contact and opposition with the evil one. At his study, in bed, or in his cell, the devil was incessantly interfering with his work or rest. As he was going to begin his studies he heard a noise which he immediately interpreted as proceeding from his enemy. He said, “As I found he was about to begin again, I gathered together my book and got back into bed. Another time in the night I heard him above my cell walking in the cloister; but as I knew it was the devil I paid no attention to him and went back to sleep.” Again he says: “Early this morning, when I awoke, the fiend came and began disputing with me. Thou art a great sinner,” said he, I replied. ‘Canst thou not tell me something new, Satan?’”

All who would lay the blame for evil and sin on an imaginary devil have tried in vain, for in so doing they are fighting that which does not exist and neglecting the real devil - the devil within their own human heart; these, said Jesus, which come from within the human mind these “defile the man.”

The pagan world of Paul’s time believed in demons and spirits; some groups thought of the heavenly bodies as the abodes of spirits which held human life in thrall. Paul himself espoused no such beliefs, but he did borrow from the language of contemporary astrology to describe the conflict between good and evil. For example, he wrote:

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12). He spoke also of “the prince of the power of the air,” referring again to the powers of evil. In this way he was expressing to the Gentiles in language they could understand the very real and earnest Christian conflict with all powers of sin and evil which every Christian must experience.

GOD PROVIDES ARMOUR

God has not left us defenceless against the devil, all sin and evil, but has provided strong, tested spiritual armour. “Put on the whole armour of God,” advises the Apostle Paul, “that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:11). Then he names each essential piece of this God-given armour: “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:14-17). These would not be weapons with which to fight a corporeal devil.

WHAT DO WE FIGHT?

Paul did not engage his time warning people against a literal devil, or blaming evil on an external power, nor did he himself fight in that kind of warfare. Paul knew who he was fighting, and he also knew why he was fighting. The battle he was fighting gave him the blessed assurance that a crown of glory would be his at the coming of the Master. He affirms with confidence: “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.” Whom did he fight against? The following verse will, answer: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1 Corinthians 9:26,27). He fought to bring his body into subjection, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:4,5). By such fighting as this Paul defeated the devil.

To resist the devil means simply to conquer one’s self - a great accomplishment, for he who can rule himself is greater than “he that taketh a city.” (Proverbs 16:32).

Jesus stated clearly what we must war against: “There is nothing without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, these are they that defile the man... For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within, and defile the man.” (Mark 7:14, 15,21-23).

We repeat “All these evil things come from within, and defile the man... There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him” - nothing, whether devil or spirit or power of any kind, nothing can defile the man except his own mind give its consent.

This unequivocal statement leaves absolutely no place for the demoralizing work of the devil.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FUTURE OF THE DEVIL

Today the devil, that is, all workers of evil and iniquity, runs unrestrained. “Sentence against an evil work” not being executed speedily, “the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11). The prophet Micah foretold this condition, that men would “do evil with both hands earnestly.” (Micah 7:3).

However, this condition will not always prevail. Christ is coming to establish a new government of righteousness and equity. He is coming to put down evil and exalt righteousness and become Earth’s rightful King. (Zechariah 14:9).

How will these promises be realised? When Christ comes, all men will not readily accept Him in this capacity of absolute Ruler. The devil, the evil in men’s hearts, will come forward and all nations shall rise up and resist Him. At this time, according to the Book of Revelation, there is war in heaven: “Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was the place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (Revelation 12:7-9).

This great dragon is representative of all forms of evil extant upon earth at Christ’s return. It is “the Devil, and Satan,” the same devil and Satan that have been working down through the ages, sin darkness and iniquity, and all those who promote them.

This war takes place in “heaven” - it is a battle between the leaders of the darkness of this world and Christ and His saints, therefore its location is in the political heavens, the positions of authority. And who shall prevail in this great battle, this war in heaven? Christ and His saints, for the “great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan,” he and all his angels (co-agents, messengers).

All evil will be suppressed, put down, though not destroyed until the end of the Millennial reign.

THE DEVIL BOUND, LOOSED, DESTROYED

During the glorious Millennial reign of Christ, the devil or evil, will be bound. Revelation 20:1-3 is definite: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless put, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he should be loosed a little season.”

Certainly this description could not be taken literally; how could a spiritual pit confine a literal devil?

During the thousand years, evil will be bound in the hearts of men - they will not dare disobey the law of God, as so many are doing now. Another divine forecast applies to this period: “And thine ears shall hear

a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” (Isaiah 30:21).

At the end of the thousand years, Satan shall “be loosed a little season,” after which he shall be cast into the “lake of fire,” “which is the second death.” (Revelation 20:14,10, 21:8). Sin and evil shall perish forever from the earth, and nothing but righteousness and holiness, peace and love and every good survive to bless with pleasures for evermore the immortal inhabitants of an earth made over new.

Far from interfering in that heavenly new world, the devil shall belong to the “former” which “shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. (Isaiah 65:17).

CHAPTER NINE

WHAT IS HELL?

Does the Bible teach that God has prepared a burning, fiery hell for the punishment of evildoers? Is there a place of torment where the wicked shall suffer eternally? If not, what does the Bible tell us about hell?

These questions have troubled serious thinking people. The problem concerns each of us directly, for if there is such a place as hell and if God condemns wicked men and women to its miseries, there is always the possibility that some of us may go there.

Before we accept a tradition, let us investigate thoroughly all that the Bible teaches on the subject.

First, the Almighty invites us to reason: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.” (Isaiah 1:18). So let us reason: would a loving God of mercy and justice and truth torture men and women through all eternity for what evil they could commit in a short three score years and ten? Would such a doctrine be reasonable?

What sacrilege to claim that our loving, kind, heavenly Father would consign even the meanest creature of His Creation to such a fate! Could a worse lie be told on a merciful, just Father? Can you believe this savage doctrine? No! for it is not reasonable; and it is not scriptural. God does not ask us to believe anything so cruel. By carefully weighing all the Bible has to say on the subject we find that nowhere does it teach eternal torment.

Yet many evangelists and zealous religious teachers have said that the wicked will be consigned to the most excruciating torments where they will shriek in eternal agony in a sweltering ocean of blackness, fire and horrible confusion.

But no! No such hell has any part in the plan of God. What is God’s plan for punishing the unfaithful servants? He witnesses in Deuteronomy 30:19 He has set before men “life and death,” not eternal life either in misery or happiness. His offer is simple: obey and live, disobey and die (Deuteronomy 11:26,27).

Jesus says of the broad road that it leads to destruction, not eternal torment. (Matthew 7:13). He also specifies the duration of that punishment: “These shall go away into everlasting punishment.” (Matthew 25:45). They shall not live on and on in agony, but shall be destroyed for ever.

The word “hell” used frequently throughout the Bible, is translated from the Hebrew word “sheol,” and the Greek word “hades,” neither of which are defined as meaning a place of torment but simply death, the grave, destruction, annihilation. Paul says that the “wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23).

WHY BELIEVE IN HELL?

Through the centuries many religious-minded people have thought it necessary to believe in hell, either because they thought that the Bible teaches it or because it was God’s way, they felt, of persuading men and women to repent of their sins and fear and obey Him. How else could they be constrained to subject

themselves to the law of God? How else could they be compelled to recognise their need, to repent and reform their lives?

“The Doctrinal Teaching of the Church” by Quentin do Le Bedoyers explains the basic Roman Catholic belief in hell:-

“Hell was prepared for the devil and his companions. The fact that some of us may go there does not mean that it was God’s wish that we should do so. In fact, his wish is that everyone should be saved... The souls in hell are those who have preferred to reject his outstretched hand and have crucified Christ again...”

There have been many people who have been denying the reality of hell, since they feel that a good and merciful God could not inflict such a torment on his creatures. Others have held for the same reason that it will not last forever, and that one day even the wicked will be joined to God. But though we might prefer to believe this, we have the authority of Christ himself for its existence, and it is to continue into eternity. We cannot deny the doctrine without saying that Jesus was a liar or that he was mistaken.

They feel that anything less than eternal hellfire would mean that sinners would eventually end in the realm of happiness and thus sin would triumph over God. The fear of hell removed, sin would abound because sinners would know that eventually they would succeed in getting the best of both worlds.

Jonathan Edwards, eighteenth century American evangelist, preached hell vividly and convincingly:-

“The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider over a fire, is dreadfully provoked; his wrath toward you burns like fire. It is nothing but his hand that keeps you from falling into the fire every moment. O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: you hang by a slender thread with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have nothing you have ever done to induce God to spare you one moment...”

It is everlasting wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. When you look forward you will see a boundless duration before you, and you will despair of ever having any deliverance.”

But this is the doctrine of men, not the teaching of the Bible.

SOULS NOT IMMORTAL

Why do people believe in hell? Because they believe that God created every man’s “soul” immortal, and that therefore that soul must live on eternally somewhere, either in happiness (heaven) or misery (hell). But this theory is only a delusion, though it has turned many away from God. It is a pagan doctrine, taught by Socrates, elaborated by Plato, and wholly unscriptural.

The apostle Paul foretold that a time would come when men would not “endure sound doctrine,” but rather their own lusts should “heap to themselves teachers having itching ears,” and they would turn away their ears from the “truth,” and should turn to “fables.” 2 Timothy 4:3, 4). The idea of souls going immediately to “heaven” or “hell” at death is among these fables.

The Bible does not teach the immortality of the soul. The phrase “immortal soul” or its equivalent does not occur once in Holy Writ- The apostle Paul declares that Christ brought “life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (1 Timothy 1:10). Not that we possess it by birth. He says also that immortality is for those “who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” (Romans 2:7).

The soul can die: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. (Ezekiel 18:20). “He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence. (Psalm 78:50).

The soul can be destroyed: “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear the prophet (Christ), shall be destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:23).

The soul is the entire person. No man possesses a soul, a spirit or a personality, separate from the body that can leave the body at death. Man does not possess a soul, he is a soul. As we quoted before, “Every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed...” A soul is a living being, a creature, not a separate entity apart from the creature.

All hope of life beyond death hinges upon the resurrection of the body (1 Thessalonians 4:13. Job 14:14,15, Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2, 1 Corinthians 15:12-20).

In the interim between death and the resurrection man knows absolutely nothing. “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten... Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10).

Death is a state of total unconsciousness. “For in death is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?” (Psalm 6:5). “The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence.” (Psalm 115:17).

There is no consciousness in death - how, then, can hell be eternal torment if the wicked shall “die,” “be destroyed,” “perish”?

Furthermore, the Bible stresses the need of a resurrection - “if there be no resurrection of the dead... then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:13,14). If the person is consigned at death either to heaven or hell, what need for the resurrection? What confusion! But God is not the author of such confusion. Whether faithful or unfaithful, all shall sleep in the grave until they are resurrected, judged and rewarded.

To be continued...