

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 210

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Editorial

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends, Loving Greetings.

As another year draws to a close I want to express deeply felt gratitude on behalf of us all, to Russell, for so faithfully and regularly producing and sending out the Circular Letter. His efforts in this regard keep us together which is very important when we are such a scattered group; and the Circular Letter's contents give us a regular reminder of the wonderful and remarkable truths that we have been so blessed to understand. Also, thanks once again to Russell, all past Nazarene literature and other associated booklets that offer invaluable insights into what we believe, are now readily and freely available to anyone who asks.

Russell now has a computer and we have been seriously considering starting a website explaining who we are and what we believe, and offering our booklets to anyone interested. If our readers have views or advice about this idea, whether we should or we shouldn't, please let us know your opinions.

Our thanks to all those who have sent contributions to the fund during the past year. We are most grateful for your support. Also for the kind letters received telling us that the Circular Letter is appreciated. Obviously we sometimes displease and even anger some of our readers, and for this we are sorry but we shall keep on trying to offer what we know to be the true Gospel and in a proper spirit, with the fervent hope that it will reach some willing ears. Russell and I and indeed all of us owe a great debt of gratitude to our dear Brother and Sister Phil and Rene Parry, for their tireless defence of the truth at every opportunity that is offered. We wish them both strength and health to continue in the battle for all our benefit.

Every year at this time, as I have mentioned before, I am always reminded of the Jewish toast "Next year in Jerusalem." For so many years during the Diaspora it had great resonance for the Jews suffering persecution at the hands of their various hosts. For us it has a particularly splendid ring to it, for when Jesus comes at last to sit on the throne of David, we pray we shall be found worthy to be there in the crowd to witness the greatest world event of all times, and that we shall be blest to hear the loving words from our beloved Saviour and Redeemer "Well done, good and faithful servant.....enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

May he come quickly.

Love to all. Helen Brady.

Brother Phil and Sister Rene Parry have written asking:

Dear Russell, In the December issue of the C.L. would you please convey our love to all our known members and also those people who receive the C.L. and are awaiting the consummation of the promises of God in Christ, whose land will remain His and unpolluted by the schemes of politicians who covet wealth and power. And President Bush has plans to part it!

We have received another letter from Brother John Stevenson on the subject of Fellowship in response to letters he has received and reported in Circular Letter No. 208:

Dear Friends in the Nazarene Fellowship,

I thank Audrey, Phil & Rene, and Helen, for their comments on my article "On the Subject of Fellowship" in C.L.107. Furthermore I wish to emphasize that I greatly value my association with the Nazarene Fellowship because for me a correct understanding of the Bible, the Gospel and the Atonement is important for true belief, and in taking seriously the commandments of Jesus to not only believe His teaching but also to DO it. If I had been brought up to believe that we all had immortal souls, as an adult I would have realized that it was an absurd teaching, and who knows where I would have gone from there.

Back in the forties and fifties I was a member of the Pacifist Movement, which believed that war was wrong and always resulted in the opposite of what it was intended to achieve. Their motto was "Wars will cease when men refuse to fight." Another member Fred E. Brown, who was much older than me, in 1958 wrote the text of a small book which he entitled "John Mark's Manifesto of the Christian Revolution". I typed it out for him so that he could try to find a publisher. It was a modern presentation of Mark's gospel with comments for the present generation.

His Introduction stated:

"John Mark has been dead a good many years now, and so he can't do this job himself. Someone has to do it however, and although I am not fully qualified to do it, the fact that I am so sure it needs doing makes it necessary for me to try. When John Mark first put his manifesto in writing there were several things he took for granted, and several others which never occurred to him. In the first place he had no idea that nearly two thousand years after he wrote it, I should be editing it for another very different generation. If his thoughts ever reached so far into the future, he probably would have expected that his manifesto would be quite out of date by this time. Its predictions and hints of the future should have been fulfilled long ago, and it should not now be necessary for anyone to look so far back into the past for light and guidance through the dark labyrinth which is the world of the mid-twentieth century...."

Fred invited me to write a foreword, and this is part of what I wrote: -

"A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today'. And he answered 'I will not', but afterward he repented and went. And the man went to the second son and said the same; and he answered 'I go sir', but he did not go. Which of these two did the will of his father? In this concise parable Jesus spotlights the uppermost facet of His teaching which He constantly stressed, - wholehearted sincerity in discipleship. Those who call Him 'Lord, Lord' must obey His teaching. 'Everyone who hears my words and does them' (not just believes them) 'will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock'. In His picture of the Judgement, the people of the nations are sifted, not according to their creeds and dogmas, but according to their motives and actions. 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'.

"In contrast to these precepts, the basis of almost every popular church and sect is a list of dogmas, such as a creed, catechism, or profession of faith. Membership of these churches

depends on verbal assent to these lists of theological dogmas, which without exception are open to serious question, to say the least... Nothing could be further from the spirit of Jesus' teaching. In His time, theological controversy was red-hot, but Jesus had no time to waste on it (except when challenged by His tempters, whom He floored very effectively). He was too preoccupied in proclaiming morality, or to give it another name, spirituality. If we were to be saved by a creed, Jesus would have given us one. Instead, He gave us the Sermon on the Mount, with a clear warning that it was meant to be taken literally and practised conscientiously... Whether you can bring yourself to believe in God or not, the fact remains that life is meaningless froth and bubble without these 'rocks of faith'... These fundamental principles are what Mr. Fred Brown is demonstrating from John Mark's Gospel. If time and energy could be afforded in futile striving, I could cross swords with him a dozen times on matters of theological dogma. But instead I wish only to say 'thank you' to him for his excellently thorough and thoroughly excellent exposition of the fundamentals of Jesus' message."

That was over 45 years ago. At the time I was receiving from Fred Pearce booklets, Circular Letters, and personal letters which I was digesting appreciatively. Fred Brown's book was never published; if I were to write the foreword today there would be differences which might make it unacceptable to him, because I suspect that he did not believe in the Virgin Birth, nor in the resurrection, and I think he believed that the teaching of Jesus and John Mark's "Manifesto" was intended to bring in the Kingdom of God by human effort. But that was never their intention. Humanity as a whole is too selfish and wicked. "But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men, and because He needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for He Himself knew what was in man".

Many years ago, in protest against popular creeds which were lists of theological dogmas, I devised what I called "The Disciples' Creed":-

I believe in loving God with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, and all my strength; and in placing my loyalty to God before my loyalties to my nation, my church, my clubs, my friends, and even my relatives.

- a. I believe in admitting my faults, and striving for perfection, in purity, sincerity and humility.
- b. I believe in loving my neighbour as myself, and in loving my enemies likewise; in forgiving them, praying for them, doing good to them, and repaying unkindness with kindness, as I would wish them to do to me.
- c. I believe in reading my Bible every day; in praying to God night and morning, and in attending regular corporate worship of God.
- d. And I believe in telling everyone I meet the Good News, that God loves us and calls us to turn to Him, through Messiah Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

(Please do not assume that I successfully live up to these high precepts).

A lawyer, tempting Jesus, asked him "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" And Jesus said "You must honour and respect the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength. This is the great first commandment. The second is like it; you must respect and honour your neighbour as yourself. These two commandments are the basis of all the Law and the Prophets. This do, and you shall live." Then follows the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is important in that it shows how we should love our neighbour unconditionally, without judging him. The ambiguous English word "love" is used to translate four different Greek words; therefore I have used honour and respect for a more precise translation of the Greek "agape". "Love your enemies" sounds contradictory, but it is possible to respect and honour even an enemy, even while you protest against his sins. "Be ye angry and sin not". Jesus also said "Do to others as you would wish them to do to you". There is a Jewish story that a man asked a famous Rabbi to explain the Law to him while he stood on one leg; the Rabbi replied "Never do to anybody what you would not want anyone to do to you. That is the whole of the Law; all the rest is commentary."

What I am getting at is that the doing of Jesus' teaching is essential; it is what we shall be judged on. Correct understanding of theological teaching is important but secondary. The vast majority of Christians feel the need to follow a strong leader rather than decide for themselves what is the truth. This is the

essential failing of the Roman Catholic Church, in which members take their questions to the priest or the bishop, who will give answers they learned from their theological college, confirmed by their infallible Pope, who, every time he opens his mouth, “puts his foot in it”. The Christadelphian organisation is similar; Robert Roberts was their first pope, excommunicating all who thought for themselves. All churches are plagued by the same disease; loyalty to the leader rather than to Jesus and His teaching. But we must not assume that they are deliberately defying the truth of the Bible. I have said before that if our fellowship ever became popular, with hundreds or thousands of members, it would inevitably go the same way, in ignorance rather than obduracy. I attend the Salvation Army’s worship service on Sunday evenings, and I am saddened by their theological naivety and complacency, but I admire their doing of Jesus’ will; “Christianity with its sleeves rolled up”, delighting in compassionate social service in Jesus’ name.

You must remember that I came to be “born again” by a different route. I was brought up in Christadelphian beliefs by my father, but I was never able to join them because it did not make sense to me that God would save us just because we knew where the popular churches were wrong, and I was never baptised by them. In my mid-teens I felt that the Christadelphians did not have a clear understanding of the atonement, but neither did I. In my late teens I was invited to an Anglican fellowship which had an outstanding preacher, who taught that God loved us, insignificant selfish human animals that we are, but the Almighty Creator loved us so much that He sent His only-begotten Son, who loved His Father and us so completely that He willingly died for us, at the hands of stupid religious leaders and corrupt Roman authorities, to call us to repentance and save us. I knew he was right; for the first time I realized that this was the central teaching of the Gospel. How could I not respond to that love? So I made a commitment and was baptised by total immersion in the Church of Christ at age 19, (not realizing that the C. of E. could have done that for me if I had asked), and the following year became a confirmed Anglican. When that preacher died suddenly in his early sixties I was shocked and bereft, but soon realized that other Anglican ministers were not in the same class; in fact most churches and ministers are “dead on their feet”. All this happened several years before my brother-in-law gave me some Nazarene Fellowship literature, as a result of which I contacted Fred Pearce. Although I am very grateful to the N.F. for correct understanding of the Gospel and the Atonement, which for you and me is vitally important, I still feel that my primary Christian duty is to love my neighbour as myself, even though most of my neighbours are deluded by false understanding of biblical doctrine; at least a few of them clearly understand the command to love our neighbour as our self. It is not our right to judge such people. It is our duty to witness to the truth every chance we get, but otherwise to respect those who love God and His Word. In the C.L. 207 I mentioned Madge Prentice who was a dedicated Christian, but through no fault of her own, never heard anything other than orthodox church teaching; she never heard what we regard as the truth. We all agree that Christadelphians are mistaken about the atonement, but that is not their main fault; their real sin is disfellowshipping all who do not toe the line and accept the BASF unquestioningly. Exactly as Roman Catholics will excommunicate anyone who doubts the unbiblical Athanasian Creed. The day will come when we are no longer misfits and cranks but will be vindicated by our Saviour. We could then be in for a surprise to find just who are our fellow citizens in the Kingdom.

I thank Audrey for her comments. She may be right that at the last supper only the 12 Apostles were present with Jesus, but I am still not sure. But I feel that we are not in isolation; we meet people every day, and should witness when we can, but in disputing popular beliefs we should not be judgemental. Remember how Jesus welcomed humble people. Thanks also to Helen (editorial C.L. 209) and I particularly agree with her parents’ wisdom in encouraging her to experience other sects. I can’t agree that Christadelphians sincerely believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God; they may have once, but now it is only lip-service like other sects. Thanks also to Rene and Phil; I would make the same comments to their remarks. I realize we are not of the world, but we are in the world, and I am not sure about adopting a stance of separation on theological concepts. Of course we must separate ourselves from evildoers, but most Christians do not intentionally believe wrong doctrine, many nowadays will listen to our protests. I would never consort with Christadelphians, though that is their decision, not mine, and I am content with that. But I feel that partaking of the emblems when alone is being judgemental; by consorting with Christians we will inevitably get chances to witness for the Truth, even though not often. As I said in C.L. 207, I do often feel very alone spiritually, knowing that most Christians believe that their pastors and leaders are the experts who will give them the right answers. I was once asked “Do you mean to say that all the millions of Christians down the centuries were mistaken?” to which I had to answer “Yes”. But I should have answered “Not deliberately mistaken, but misled by watered-down theology”. It is so easy for a vociferous experienced

preacher to argue convincingly - with supportive texts - that we have an immortal soul; that Jesus pre-existed His birth; that the Holy Ghost is a person who is the third of the trinity; even that there is a fiery hell of eternal torment. Of course millions have been misled. But not about doing the teaching of Jesus; there is no room for error there, unless one hasn't any time to read the Bible. Peter said "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him". "What is right" is taught in the Sermon on the Mount; the Sermon on the Plain; in Matthew 25; 1 Corinthians 13; the Epistle of James; and many other places if you look for them. (Luther was right about salvation by grace, but appallingly wrong about James' epistle). I have a large pile of Nazarene Fellowship booklets, from Fred Pearce, from Ernest Brady, from Russell, but I have great trouble finding anyone interested to read any of them. I will finish with a little quote from the Salvos:

"There is nothing, - no circumstance, no trouble, no testing, - that can ever touch me until it has first gone past God and past Christ - right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment. But as I refuse to become panicky; as I lift up my eyes to Him and accept it as coming from the Throne of God for some great purpose to my own heart; no sorrow will ever disturb me; no trial will ever disarm me; no circumstance will cause me to fret; for I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is. That is the rest of Victory."

Amen to such faith. John Stevenson.

We received the following letter dated 24th October 2004, from Brother Paul Pells regarding the distinction between "death" and "the death":

Dear Russell and Phil and fellow Nazarenes

As Nazarenes, in your many booklets I wonder whether you have ever noticed or spotted that there is a difference in the Scriptures (and I talk of the Greek, not the deficiencies in the A.V. and others) between what Paul calls 'death,' and 'THE death'? I assume the booklet title is quoted from 1 Corinthians 15:21 when it says "By Man Came Death, What Death?" But you appear to have missed the distinction, or at least, not brought out in your articles, some of the Scriptures I have excerpted and printed below from the Authorised Version. The Greek word for 'the' is inserted by Paul, I believe, to impress that there is a difference. So there must be a difference! The preface in the Emphatic Diaglott shows all the cases for the definite article if you are interested.

I believe, in a booklet you gave me, I once read that you made as many as five distinctions of the word 'death' in Scripture. But I want to deal with the two you refer to as 'natural' and 'judicial.'

Scripturally Paul makes a distinction between 'death' and 'the death' which I have mentioned above. So I think we would be enlightened by making a note (as I have in my Bible) of where they occur in the AV, which if we use exclusively, is not helpful in this subject to arrive at THE truth. The Concordant Version makes a note of most of them but I have noticed at least one omission when comparing to the Greek original in the Diaglott. The Greek also makes a distinction between 'sin' and 'THE sin' which is interesting, but if you haven't noticed this relation to THE death I don't see how it can be fully grasped. It needs to be brought out and I think Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 15 do this.

Without an untampered original manuscript or an exact translation of the same (i.e. a word for word translation) an Englishman can never arrive at the whole truth or the truth on the subject under discussion, unless perhaps he speaks Greek?

As I say, the Authorised Version is unhelpful for this task even this may well have errors, the earliest being from about the 3rd or 4th century I believe.

In the above verses the Concordant Version text has a superior dot · which means ‘the’ is in the Greek. In the Concordant Version also this dot seems now and again to me to be missed. If you have come to a decision of which death is meant when it speaks of ‘THE death’ please tell me so I can reason further and apply your understanding to other passages.

Examine the mentions of ‘death’ and ‘THE death’ in say 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 and 7 below and tell me whether you think ‘THE death’ is judicial or natural, then I can in turn apply that understanding to other Scriptures in light of that.

The word is sharper than any double-edged sword so lets not blunt it with poor translations and omissions!

1 Corinthians 15:21-26 “For since by man came THE death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in THE Adam all die, even so in THE Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the* first fruits; afterwards they that are THE Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is THE death.

Romans 5:12-14. “Wherefore, as by one man THE sin entered into the world, and THE death by THE sin; and so THE death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the* law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless THE death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Romans 6:20–23. “For when ye were servants of THE sin, ye were free from THE righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from THE sin, and become servants to THE God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life. For the wages of THE sin is death; but the gift of THE God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Note: “the wages” is *opsonion* in Greek, which means provision, not a wage).

Romans 7:7-20. “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known THE sin, but by the law: for I had not known THE lust, except the law said, Thou halt not covet. But THE sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, The sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For THE sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good. Was then that which is the good made death unto me? God forbid. But THE sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is the good; that THE sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under THE sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but THE sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but THE sin that dwelleth in me.”

Don’t forget: “Not a *yud* or a *kotz* – dot or stroke will pass until all be fulfilled.”

Your fellow student, Paul Pells.

* ‘The’, as here, is sometimes inserted.

* * *

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

Dear Paul, Greetings in Jesus' Name. Thank you for your letter of the 24.10.04 regarding my booklet "By Man Came Death – What Death?"

I am surprised that you do not see in the booklet that my motive is to show that there is a difference, or as you put it, a distinction between death and the death. I have stated plainly that the death which came by sin was not operating as a judicial sentence when Adam was created a living soul capable of physical decline according to the appointment of his Creator.

I have no difficulty in understanding what Paul is teaching in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15:21 especially when he defines sin as transgression of God's Law. We could rightly read 1 Corinthians 15:21 as follows – 'For since by one man's (Adam's) transgression came the death by his sin, that is, under sentence of death legally, for it is impossible that a man with a nature already appointed to die if left to itself without any further and improved modification, should be sentenced to the possession of the same nature he had at creation = A LIVING SOUL.

We have tried to show this latter distinction to all who hold the doctrine of Original Sin especially the people who profess to know the Truth yet are left with the fact of believing Adam must have been created incapable of physical death and that his sin required a miracle-change to make death possible. One would welcome the ability to interpret the Greek original text and also the Hebrew but in observing the context and rightly dividing the Word of God, even the A.V. is sufficient to grasp what is being taught; example the term "Surely die" means inflicted death for a certain reason. This is explained in Genesis 2:17, Ezekiel chapters 18 and 33, Genesis 20:7, 1 Kings 2:36-46.

The fact Adam was not put to death in fulfilment of Genesis 2:17 gives some people the idea that Adam's exit from the Garden and ultimate return to the ground was the penalty for his sin when in fact this was a result of the provisional covering for sin foreshadowed in the shed blood of the lamb from which the covering skins were obtained, the lamb being a substitute for Adam's inflicted death, a type of Jesus who would give His life in the blood in due time, the JUST FOR THE UNJUST, a fact which most elements of the Christadelphian community reject and make themselves by their ignorance of the work of God in His Son, unworthy of eternal life. For as Jesus said, "This is life eternal to know Thee the only true God and Jesus Anointed whom Thou hast sent."

Therefore if Jesus be not a substitute for Adam's incurred penalty the term 'Atonement' is meaningless and shows no distinction between death by reason of corruptible nature as appointed to the human species and The Death by sin judicially related to Divine Law.

The Nazarenes have laboured to show this distinction even by comparing Scripture with Scripture from the King James Version and if it is not clear to those who desire the Truth then they must be accepting the doctrine of false teachers.

We are Yours Sincerely, in anticipation of the coming of Christ.

Phil and Rene.

* * *

Further to the above letter I wrote to Paul Pells as follows:

Dear Paul, Your findings re death and the death support and confirm what we have believed and taught for so long and it is interesting to see the same distinction can be seen between sin and the sin – where the sin, the original sin of Adam, brought in judicial death. We have always made the distinction between this, The Sin of Adam under which we are concluded as servants in bondage until baptism into the death of Jesus Christ, and sin as personal transgressions; which sin can be forgiven us for Jesus' sake (death for the faithful is but a sleep).

Regarding Romans 5:12 the Emphatic Diaglott renders this as “Wherefore, as by one man THE sin entered into the world, and THE death by THE sin; and so THE death passed upon all men, in which all have sinned” makes good sense though this is not universally accepted, perhaps because many translators have not seen the distinction that the apostle Paul was making.

Then in the next chapter we read at verse 20 “For when ye were servants of THE sin, ye were free from THE righteousness... But now being made free from THE sin, and become servants of THE God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life...” Being now free from THE sin is utterly denied by those believing in sin in the flesh, as is the teaching of Jesus regarding judgment, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life (*zoe*), and shall not come into judgment.”

Then we have the problem of Romans 7 where it appears Paul contradicts himself by saying he “is carnal sold under THE sin...” This is in contradiction of his teachings in chapters 6 and 8, which contradictions are conveniently ignored by sin-in-the-flesh mongers. Personally I believe the translators were carried away by their belief in the doctrine of Original Sin and thus biased in what they wrote. The Greek language used tenses differently to us and I believe it would have been quite in order for translators to put these verses into the past tense so that they would read “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I was carnal, sold under THE sin,” etc. The first verse of the next chapter shows that Paul was at the time of writing, freed from the law of sin and death and no longer was he ‘sold under sin’ but had been ‘bought with a price;’ no longer under condemnation now that he is ‘in Christ Jesus’ and belongs to Him.

I agree with Brother Phil Parry that if we read the Authorised Version prayerfully and with discernment we can come to the truth of the matter and there is no urgent need for an understanding of the original language in which the Scriptures were written.

Russell Gregory

We have now received a third letter from Eric Phipps in which he persists in repeating his views. Following his letter there is a reply from Brother Phil Parry and a response from myself in which I have set out briefly our understanding of the Scriptures concerned:

Dear Russell, Your letter dated 27th September in reply to mine of the 21st August came to hand and the contents read. I respond as follows:

Your recap of my convictions introduces by your wording thoughts which I did not express in my letters or indeed accept. I believe what the Scriptures state and logically imply, namely that when God created the beasts of the field as stated in Genesis chapter one He included in that creation a serpent with the power of speech and with a subtle mind or as the Hebrew Tanakh (the Hebrew Scriptures) expresses it, “the shrewdest of all the beasts that the Lord God had made.”

It was a literal thinking speaking serpent created especially (and therefore unique) to test the loyalty and obedience of Adam and Eve to their Creator as subsequent events make plain. It did not converse with Eve upon moral matters, as such, because it had no appreciation of morality. That is the exercise of minds endowed with the capacity to determine right and wrong which the serpent or indeed any of the animals are not. What the serpent did was to question the truth and validity of God’s command, insinuating that by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree they would become as those superior beings (the Elohim) with whom they conversed in the Garden of Eden and would not surely die.

Such was the means that God in His wisdom and discretion saw fit to put to the proof the obedience of our first parents. Nor am I the least embarrassed (as you in your imagination are sure I am) in my description of the serpent. It would be good to refer to what I did say and not your own coloured picture of the scene which evidently causes you discomfiture (not me) to the point where you discard the plain record as wholly fictitious. I did not describe the serpent as a fantastic creature for it was not a fantasy but very real and actual. It was certainly unique but not unwholesome (except to your mind) for it was created by God for the specific purpose already stated which was wholly good.

But you Russell are like your friend the late Eric Cave who ridiculed the statement in Isaiah chapters 11 and 65 concerning the alteration in the habits of the wild beasts in the millennial age saying that it was impossible for the lion to eat straw like the ox because its physical constitution did not allow for such a digestive process – as though God was limited in His power to change that order of things as He will change our vile bodies (if we are found worthy) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Such doubting of the inspired Word of God is deplorable. It is serpent-like in its beguiling influence upon immature minds.

In my last letter I asked you why God should create a serpent unique in its subtle and alien thinking to be the instrument of temptation. As I wrote then and now repeat, you do not ask still less answer the question. This in spite of the fact of what the inspired apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:3, to which I referred you. He believed in the literal beguiling serpent and indeed all the events as narrated in Genesis. But you Russell in these days of superior learning seem to know better. You assert that “God would not in His love, mercy, goodness and loving kindness submit poor Adam and Eve to the wiles of such a fantastic unwholesome creature in order to demoralize and persuade Adam and Eve to do wrong.” Such a statement reveals the shallowness of your understanding both of the character and purpose of the God whom we worship as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in His Word.

In the case of “poor Adam and Eve” the serpent was the instrument created and used by God to test their loyalty and obedience. It was in fact a test of faith on their part of the supremacy of their Creator. Being created with the privilege and responsibility of free-will God saw fit to prove them as indeed He does all His servants in this regard. In this matter I repeat what I wrote in my last letter – it is not for us to question the prerogative of God in the means used for His purposes. Prerogative is the exclusive right of a person because of his rank to act as he thinks fit. That applies particularly and absolutely to God who is Supreme and whose ways and thoughts are higher than mere mortals as the heavens are above the earth. That is not to say that we cannot or should not reason out the wisdom of His actions and decisions – a distinction which you utterly fail to appreciate as revealed in your comments on Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18.

The Scriptures throughout reveal that in God’s dealings with men and women trial of their character always precedes exaltation. Through the instruments of His power (often unseen) He directs events and circumstances which try the faith of those who are the subject of His particular interest. This can be seen in the lives of all the faithful men and women brought to our notice in the scriptures, without exception.

The serpent in its knowledge of the command of God given to Adam and Eve, along with the dire consequences which would ensue if disobedient, began by questioning the veracity of both the command and its purpose. The lies that it expressed were alien to anything previously experienced by Eve and like all things novel had an initial appeal, so that instead of dismissing them as foreign to the mind of God and forgetting the responsibility she had to her Creator and His Supremacy she, beguiled by the serpent’s sophistry and in that frame of mind so created, saw that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes and desirable as a means to make her wise she both ate of the fruit and gave to Adam and he ate also.

So by the exercise of their own free-will in circumstances divinely arranged for the purpose of trial, they failed. That is the simple message of Genesis 3:1-6, all of which you deny.

You go on to again assert that God created Adam a dying corrupting being in contradistinction to the inspired record that God breathed into the nostrils of the dust formed creature the breath of life and man became a living soul. That which up to that point was inanimate – dead – became alive – the opposite of what you believe for death was excluded by God’s action. Your assertion is presumption with no scriptural basis whatever, but which you have to maintain as a prime factor of your doctrinal position for without it the edifice built upon it falls. So you create an artificial distinction between what you call natural death and judicial death which is a chimera, if ever there was one, entirely of your own making. I again refer to the apostle Paul who in Romans 5:12 states: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned.”

If words mean anything as plain fact then it is evident that they are meant to teach that so far as man is concerned there was no death before it entered for the reason stated. The death referred to (cessation of life) was indeed judicial for it was punishment for disobedience and still is.

You then challenge me to “list just one or two texts which tell us plainly that Jesus died for himself as well as for us.” In point of fact I have already referred to one irrefutable passage in my original reply to your challenge but which you have conveniently ignored. You will I think recognise that Jesus was the anti-type of the high Priest under the Law of Moses. Referring to this the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 5 verse 3 states that the high priest being in the same condition before God as those he represented had to offer sacrifice both for himself as well as for the people. The apostle goes on in the chapter to make clear that Jesus in the days of his flesh was in the same condition – verses 7 and 8.

In the same epistle in chapter 9 verse 12 in referring to Jesus we read that “Christ being come an high priest... neither by the blood of goats and calves but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption” – the words “for us” are not in the original.

As I pointed out in my first letter the word “obtained” is, in the Greek, in the reflexive voice and refers to Jesus the offerer of the sacrifice. That his sacrifice was, in the purpose of God, also for us is very true but which could only be so by reason of what he first accomplished for himself. We have this confirmed in the same chapter in verses 26-28, “but now once in the end of the world (the Mosaic age) hath he (Jesus) appeared to put away sin (singular) by the sacrifice of himself... So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many and to them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” What words and their meaning could be more clear?

In addition to the foregoing you leave to the last paragraph of your letter the reference I made to 1 John 3:5. You now, rather begrudgingly accept that the reference to Jesus having no sin refers to him following his resurrection. This is a statement of truth in support of what we have quoted from Hebrews in chapter 9. It totally destroys the other foundation of your doctrinal edifice. Jesus in his present glorified state is without sin but possessed it at his first appearing in order to remove it by the sacrifice of himself. All the other references you make confirming that the sacrifice of Jesus was for our salvation are in fact rendered null and void without a recognition that it was first for himself that it might be for us. Such is the vital importance of a correct scriptural understanding of the matter.

But the references I have made to 1 John chapter 3 and the letter to the Hebrews are by no means all that are to the point. John the Baptist on the occasion of the baptism of Jesus stated as recorded in John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin (singular) of the world. Moreover in the quotation you make from Isaiah 53 in evidence that Jesus died for our sins you completely miss the point made by the prophet in the same chapter. In verse 6 we read “the lord hath laid on him the iniquity (singular) of us all. In verse 8 we read “for the transgression (singular) of my people was he stricken. In verse 12 we read “he bare the sin (singular) of the many.”

We may well ask what sin, what iniquity, what transgression is being referred to? The sin and iniquity (for that is what sin is) is that referred to by the apostle Paul in Romans 7. Sin real and actual which is the cause of transgression which by inheritance from his mother Jesus possessed and both overcame it in his life and destroyed in his death. This in order that the transgression of God’s people might be forgiven in him.

In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2 verse 23, we read, “Him (Jesus) being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God ye (the Jews) have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” In Isaiah 53:10 we read “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed and shall prolong his days and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”

When in your letter you refer to “poor Adam and Eve having the serpent to contend with which fact you deny because God is love, full of mercy, goodness and loving kindness” perhaps you would consider what by “His determinate counsel and foreknowledge” He allowed, indeed, arranged for His only begotten well-beloved Son to undergo in pain suffering and death (for it was God’s will) in order to bring salvation and eternal life, first to His Son and then through him to His people. Through it all we see the supremacy of God restored and all those great attributes you mention but together also with His righteousness and justice made manifest indeed vindicated in the sacrifice of Christ. No mention or inkling of a “free life” or any idea of substitution both of which are utterly foreign to Scriptural teaching. It is by God’s grace we are saved.

Your whole thesis is flawed from beginning to end and is revealed again in the remarks you make concerning your reference to Hebrews 2:14,15.

In breaking down the quotation you make, you go on to ask the question “were the children condemned because they were flesh and blood?” and deny that God would condemn what He had made. Well for once you are quite right – He did not. But what you fail to see (along with so much else) is that the flesh and blood He condemned was not the same as that which was created at the first in Adam. Our first parents added an alien element to that pristine flesh which made it obnoxious in the sight of God. Of their own volition they imbibed the evil thinking of the serpent so making its mind their mind so that the fleshly table of the heart (the brain) became contaminated and as that organ in that condition controls the rest of the flesh of man so it was condemned by God along with all descended from it. That carnal mind (as the Scriptures call it) is possessed by all Adam’s progeny including Jesus. You have it and I have it. It is what we continually do battle with. Alone of humanity Jesus first overpowered it by the sheer power of his spiritual mind and then destroyed it (the diabolos) in his death.

You continue by adding error to error for it is inevitable that one error begets another.

In commenting upon the reference by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 in respect of the difference in glory of bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial you ask would I turn the glory of the terrestrial into a creation to be condemned. All I need say in reply is that when the world of terrestrial bodies in the days of Noah turned into a veritable “hell on earth” it was not only condemned but annihilated by God as indeed His judgments will come upon the present world of terrestrial bodies and for the same reason. When that work has been effected and the remaining population turn to God in reverence and worship as they will in the Millennial Age so the terrestrial glory referred to will be seen. Your question therefore becomes irrelevant.

In the phrase from Hebrews 2:14 which you quote the reduction to inactivity and making powerless of that (the diabolos) having the power of death was by its destruction by death – the same word for death being used in the Greek thus making plain the meaning.

Then all your comments in respect of bondage and freedom especially the last paragraph on page 4 of your letter are a travesty of the scriptural truth on the subject.

You write – “the children were in bondage because their father sinned. Jesus father never sinned” as though such a puerile statement proves that Jesus was never in bondage. May I ask you whether Adam had a mother?

Jesus did and who was a descendant of Adam following his transgression with all the implications in respect of sin arising from that fact in respect of bondage to sin and death which Jesus inherited. But Jesus by reason of his Paternity and the development by his own conscious efforts of the greater moral capacity that he also inherited, broke that bondage by overcoming its shackles whilst he was living and was released by God from its power by being raised from the dead.

Read the Messianic Psalm 118 with a little discernment and marvel at the outworking of God’s work of salvation in Christ in deliverance of the bondage from sin and death and how the foundation was laid whereby we through our belief and baptism into Christ might in due time be freed from the same bondage.

It is all so completely foreign to your false teaching of a “free” life and the idea of substitution held by all the so-called Christian Churches from the Papacy downwards.

But you give your show away when in the parenthesis you insert you say “I share your abhorrence of substitution were it a case of God demanding the punishment of an innocent man so that the guilty can go free, but God is not perverse as to demand such a thing.” But of course God did no such thing. But neither was He so perverse as to accept or expect a substitute to satisfy His own law of Sin and Death in the place of those who came under it.

What God did was to provide in His own Son a man who whilst under that Law made manifest in himself the righteousness of his Father in the condemnation of sin by death. The recognition that he himself was made sin being born of Mary and therefore flesh of sin and although without personal transgression voluntarily laid down his life upon the cross as a representative of fallen humanity. By so doing he shewed to all with eyes to see how obnoxious sin is in the sight of God and made manifest both the supremacy and righteousness of God by his own acknowledgment of both those attributes of His character. The justice of God is then seen in that as the sin (the diabolos) possessed by His Son was not something for which he was responsible so God raised him from the dead to life eternal with glory and honour, for the grave could not be holden of him. Moreover all who come to God in the recognition of the foregoing truth and render that obedience of faith and belief in baptism (which act encapsulates all of which we have written) so by the grace and mercy of God will in due time be raised from the dead to eternal life.

It was by such experiences of evil; common to us all that Jesus might become (as he now is) a merciful and faithful High Priest that he might make reconciliation for the sins of the people. As it is recorded "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).

But in addition to that vital work which was only possible by being made of sin's flesh (with sin in it) for its eradication it is also written "wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" for the work of High Priest. No argument on your part can explain away the force of these words.

What we are as descendants of Adam following transgression, so was Jesus. Under the reign of sin and death suffering pain and sorrow and all the ills that man is heir to so was Jesus for the reason given, for had he not so been made he would not have been fit to be a merciful and faithful High Priest for us.

Had he been made as Adam was before he transgressed, as you aver, not being under the sentence of death, destitute of knowledge of good and evil, suffering neither sorrow or pain, Jesus could have had no fellow feelings with ourselves. But we are told that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" that "he learned obedience by the things that he suffered" that "he himself hath suffered being tempted that he might be able to succour them that are tempted for we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are yet without transgression."

None of this would have obtained had he been possessed of a "free life" and not under Adamic condemnation. Adam when first created had neither to do battle with and destroy the diabolos or become a High Priest but Jesus in his work of redemption had to do both hence the necessity for him to be made exactly the same as his suffering death-stricken brethren, enduring the same experience of evil.

To go on as you do and assert "We too can render perfect obedience to our Heavenly Father as Jesus did if we seek help as he did" is a flagrant contradiction of the scriptures concerning our present fallen state. There is not a man that liveth that sinneth not. Great spiritually minded man as was the apostle Paul, he admitted that in his flesh dwelleth no good thing, that when he would do good evil was present with him and that the cause of his failure to conform to the commandments of God was "sin that dwelleth in me" – that he was carnal sold under sin – he groaned within himself waiting for the adoption to wit, the redemption of the body, for until that time he found himself in captivity to the law of sin. Only when our bodies have been changed following the resurrection from the dead will the faithful be made like the angels able to render perfect obedience – and only then. Now in our present sin-stricken state we have not the moral strength to be perfect. Jesus, by reason of having God for his Father was able by his own development of his greater moral capacity able to overcome. He filled his mind, so capacitated, with the Word of God to the extent that he became the Word made flesh and by the power that gave him was able to perfectly resist every temptation.

In respect of the children of Israel and the foolish comments you make in the penultimate paragraph of your letter I refer you in reply to the prophet Isaiah and suggest you read the 59th chapter. There we have presented the reasons for their wickedness in their refusal to listen to the voice of the Lord their God and keep his commandments, but also the solution to the problem by God providing the means of redemption in Christ. The whole chapter and its message is subversive of all your teaching.

With regard to the comments you make in your last paragraph I repeat what I have written elsewhere in this letter that Jesus not only possessed the diabolos but that it never possessed him. He overcame it all his lifetime here on earth as you admit but as the apostle Paul confirms (which you deny) destroyed in his death.

Finally I note that on the back of all your literature you affirm that the Nazarene fellowship has no constitution, creed or statement of faith outside the pages of the Bible. However in the course of this correspondence you have made clear that you believe the following as tenets of your faith.

1. That Adam was originally created a dying corrupting being.
2. That you distinguish between that death which you call natural and that death which entered into the world by sin which you call judicial and the cause of condemnation.
3. That the serpent described in genesis chapter 3 was not the cause of transgression if indeed such a creature endowed with speech and a subtle mind existed.
4. That Jesus as Son of Man was made as Adam was originally before he sinned and was therefore without sin being immaculate.
5. That Jesus as Son of God possessed a free life i.e. free from Adamic condemnation
6. That Jesus gave up this free life as a substitute in order to free Adam from the debt he owed to the Law of sin and Death.
7. That, by implication, eternal life for the faithful; is not the gift of God by grace but the belief in the saving efficacy of this substitution.
8. That those called of God to be His children can render perfect obedience to their Heavenly Father.
9. That the faithful will be raised from the dead incorruptible without having to appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

As the foregoing tenets of your unwritten creed are without any scriptural warranty and outside of the pages of the Bible as this correspondence by direct reference solely to the Word of God has made clear may I appeal to you that as your stated chief aim is to get your belief right, you reconsider your whole doctrinal position before it is too late.

Sincerely in defence and confirmation of the Truth,

Eric W. Phipps.

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Regarding the above letter Brother Phil Parry makes

A FEW IMPORTANT COMMENTS

Eric Phipps excludes assumptions of mere human reasoning.

1. Does he exclude the B.A.S.F. and its added Clauses, example Clause V which is assumption and not according to Scripture?

2. Nazarenes do not regard the writings of E.Turney and E.Brady as impeccable but acceptable and mainly based on Scripture where doctrine and honesty is concerned. And your members have always been afraid to challenge Nazarene convictions and misrepresented our views from 1873 onwards. Even you Eric, are guilty of misrepresenting what Russell Gregory has written on the created nature of Adam. Russell and I accept the Divine account of Genesis 2:7 as being the same as living souls that died in the Noah Flood – no changed nature by Adam’s sin as falsely taught by R.Roberts and Co. Living souls, they died; all in whose

nostrils was the breath of life. They were living souls of like nature as Adam's was at his creation. If Adam was not capable of death by infliction or of dying through the limitation of his created nature, why the Tree of Life in Eden?

3. You say, "To believe that he was corrupting from the day of his formation is crass assumption made more so by the inspired word of the Apostle Paul who wrote that "death entered into the world by sin" and not be creation. Romans 5:12. Here again you are not reading correctly PAUL'S TEACHING. Paul writes 'by one man sin entered into the world and the penalty was inflicted death as a result' – Adam being already subject to the physical law of his nature, capable of death. Proof of this is found in the words of the inspired Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. The crass assumption of which you accuse Russell should be pointed in the direction of Michael Ashton, Editor of The Christadelphian who stated that 'the wrinkled and haggard lines of aging were immediately visible on the faces of Adam and Eve as soon as they disobeyed God.' After Adam's life of 930 years can you accept such nonsense?

You use the expression "aging bodies" as the term used by Russell but I doubt Russell had that in mind knowing that Adam and Eve were perfect specimens of human flesh and blood with a life span in Adam's case of 930 years. I think you are acting in the same way as Robert Roberts did with Edward Turney in making it appear to others that Jesus had a different nature to ours whereas Turney said nothing of the kind. Reverting now to paragraph 3 – natural death by the gradual process of physical decline did not enter the world by sin, but legally inflicted death as a sentence did. Freedom from this sentence is offered now. Romans 8:1-2.

Paragraph 4. You say the mind of the serpent was passed on by inheritance. Yet God speaks of two seeds – the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Surely this cannot refer to the physical nature. Furthermore, Adam was not tempted by the serpent nor was he deceived, but circumstances that we know not of may have caused him to deliberately eat of the forbidden fruit handed to him by Eve. Again, God does not speak of a literal serpent (as in Eden) being bruised in the head and that serpent's seed bruising the heel of the woman's seed. But irrespective of this, Eric, you and also all supporters of Clause V of the B.A.S.F. believe all inheritors of Adam's nature are the seed of the serpent. You have contradicted Paul's statement, "Adam was not deceived," in your quoted words as follows – "Adam disobeyed the simple command the cause of which was the diabolos which was the mind of the serpent accepted and acted upon. That cause was passed on by inheritance to all his descendants, including Jesus right down to our day." So in one breath you say Jesus did not succumb to its power during His mission but overcame its power during His lifetime" (so I understand the Apostle to say "Resist the diabolos and he will flee from you), yet Jesus did this and the diabolos did not leave him but was taken to the cross to be destroyed. If then as you have said, the diabolos was destroyed by Jesus on the cross, how can you say that it exists right down to our day? You also say that Jesus had the mind of the serpent, which cannot be true when the Apostle Paul exhorts his fellow believers, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..." Surely Paul does not mean the diabolos was in opposition to the diabolos. Surely the mind of Christ in dying on the cross willingly was to pay the debt Adam and his posterity owed to the Edenic Law and thereby takes away its power over them, which the blood of animals could not do.

Or are you of the same frame of mind as the late A.D.Norris who said that when Jesus hung on the cross "There hung the devil (diablos) dead!?" If as you say, all except Jesus have succumbed to the power of the diabolos and Jesus overcame its power whilst He was living where was the necessity of dying on the cross? In effect you are saying that anyone who commits suicide has destroyed diabolos.

It is a fact of Scripture that God has concluded all except His Son under the sin of Adam but this does not mean He regards all men as personal sinners, for there are many examples of this in the Scriptures, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and the list in Hebrews 11, John Baptists parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, Mary the mother of Jesus, etc.

You mean to say that all these have succumbed to the mind of the serpent? Are your convictions the result of a serpent mind? They appear to me to be so and founded upon the unscriptural Clauses of the B.A.S.F. I think you need to rethink if you have any respect for TRUTH; and accept the words of Jesus, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world (of which you convict of inheriting serpent minds), but to save by him. This involves the true doctrine of the Atonement. A reading of Ephesians

chapters 1 and 2 might make you appreciate more why and for what reason Jesus went willingly to the cross. If you cannot accept our convictions there is no point in reasoning with you further, but I will add a little more.

Concerning the serpent. We do not deny that God can cause any animal or reptile for that matter to speak or reason on a subject of importance. There is proof of this in the case of Balaam and the ass speaking with man's voice. But to say, as you do Eric, that God created the serpent to tempt Eve as a test of her obedience to His declaration to Adam, "Thou shalt not eat of the tree on penalty of death" is to oppose and contradict the statement of the Apostle James, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil (not under law Himself) neither tempteth He any man but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed."

Yet you say the serpent was an instrument in the hands of God to tempt, so you must accept in contradiction of James that God does tempt. But not only so but that He addressed to Eve the words through a dumb serpent speaking with man's language which she had acquired at least through her husband Adam, for it was he who told her the importance of not eating of the forbidden tree. There is no evidence of any serpent being present and hearing God's declaration and warning to Adam; this is the reason the question was put to Eve, "Hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden"

The reply from Eve was in the form of the declaration of God to Adam and the fact that they were not physically put to death when they sinned proved that God had provided a ransom of which the scriptures leave us in no doubt and gives no licence to change the day of their transgression to a thousand years.

You seem to imply the serpent was not in existence when the other animal species were created but was specially created for the purpose of testing Adam and Eve, yet when this testing caused them to sin God removed the use of the serpent's ability to walk upright and blamed the serpent for doing with Eve the very deception for which He had created him (it). Then we find another change, the focus is no longer literal but now refers to seeds, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman but you do not mention that God created a female serpent to reproduce physically its seed. To do this Noah must take male and female into the Ark, yet you say God created this one particular serpent to test Adam and Eve. Where does this leave us?

Do we not have to accept that what took place in the Garden of Eden could have been the result of reasoning in the mind of Eve in the same way it could have been with Jesus in His trial in the wilderness? I myself do not believe there was a literal serpent nor a literal devil speaking to Jesus, but where Eve failed the test Jesus did not. The Holy Scriptures are full of metaphorical language and requires logical reasoning by the comparing of Scripture with Scripture. Where was any literal serpent-seed present at the crucifixion of Christ which is said would bruise His heel but that Christ the seed of the woman would bruise its head?

Your own community, Eric, have taught for years that Christ's resurrection reduced His crucifixion to mean a mere bruise, but did not His crucifixion deprive Him completely of life in the blood? And are you not guilty of transferring your literal, physical serpent into the mind and body of Jesus by inheritance to be destroyed on Calvary?

Are you not reversing God's word by your stating Jesus was bruised in the head and also what was said to me by one of your community that we have serpent nature and do not need, as was the case with Eve, an outside source to beguile us into wrong doing? Or is it that you also accept what the late Alfred Norris stated, that when Jesus hung on the cross the devil hung there dead? How can it be that the devil is still in existence and in consequence of your conviction of this the whole world lieth in wickedness? Has the death of Jesus achieved nothing but in your conviction destroying the Devil in Himself, leaving his power of death still reigning over all with no way of release from that power? Surely as Jesus said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for all, yet you imply that He came to destroy the Devil that worked in His flesh and blood when in fact the Apostle says "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself..." Are we to understand that the Devil and God were companions dwelling in the body of Christ when you know Jesus said, "I and my Father are one... I am in the Father and the Father in me." There can be no Devil in that statement otherwise you must be implying the Devil was in God, the Father of Jesus.

The mind of a person is the result of knowing by teaching and example right from wrong. Jesus did not inherit his mind at birth and when growing to mankind there was no rebelliousness in Him but a desire to do His Father's will and the will of His adopted father and real mother, Mary. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb; thereafter I find no room, for a serpent-mind in him or that he ever had such a mind by inheritance. If for example your parents were Roman Catholics according to that creed, does it mean at birth you inherit that same creed; why then cannot you see that the mind is not inherited but is the result of choosing the good and rejecting the bad?

There is no better example of what we Nazarenes are drawing your attention to than the words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1-6 and please note verse 12 for how can this apply to St Paul and other believers in the crucifixion of Christ in its true application if it affected himself as you falsely explain and has no meaning for others? What then have you done, Eric, to get rid of the mind of the serpent? From your letters it appears the serpent mind is still working in you against TRUTH. We have nothing against you personally but the doctrine of Rome which you preach but apply falsely to us and to Edward Turney.

Sincerely hoping you will repent and be converted,

P. Parry.

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Following the last letter from Eric Phipps I wrote a short note to him saying:

Dear Eric, It seems rather pointless to continue our correspondence. I was born into a Christadelphian family and baptised at the age of 21 only to be excommunicated at the age of 58. In all those years I never heard of anyone believing in a supernatural serpent such as you describe. Little wonder I consider it a fantasy.

I was right when I said the serpent conversed upon moral matters – God's laws are moral laws. To obey is right, to disobey is wrong. That is the essence of morality.

Of course it is the prerogative of God to choose the means of testing our faith but He will not use unethical means such as creating your serpent/diabolos and infecting the human race with its base mind making us inevitable sinners, and then murdering His own Son (Clause 12) for having obnoxious flesh! This is the blasphemy (which I have even heard described as 'beautiful'!) into which Christadelphian theology has led your community and the reason why we of the Nazarene Fellowship are making every effort to enlighten our former brethren and sisters to their awful situation.

Further to your comment regarding our late Brother Eric Cave, he wrote to the editor of The Testimony in February 1999 saying:

"I am eternally grateful to Brother Eric Phipps who first provoked me into checking the brief piece which you published for me in the February 1997 "Testimony," which resulted in me publishing "The Divine Plan – A Re-appraisal of some Christadelphian Traditions... to warn my friends of the scriptural consequences to which they were supposedly committed."

Good can come out of opposition!

In all sincerity, Russell.

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Further to the letter above I wish to write a few words which are intended to help and enlighten:

First of all, I marvel and am deeply saddened at the doggedness of Eric Phipps in saying God created a literal, knowledgeable, speaking, human-reasoning, subtle-minded, alien-thinking, lying serpent specially to tempt Adam and Eve to do wrong; and after listening to and being beguiled by this serpent both Eve's and Adam's minds were transformed, which transformation made the flesh of all mankind obnoxious to its

Creator; for which reason Jesus' body had to be destroyed as a demonstration of what human sinful flesh deserved, thus teaching the doctrine of Original Sin as set out in Clause 5 of the B.A.S.F. His persistence is ill-founded on Christadelphianism rather than the Scriptures as he claims.

Our faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God and we feel no good can come by pursuing this correspondence further and will conclude it by showing there is a sensible understanding of the Genesis account of the 'fall of man' and of the reason for Jesus' death on the Cross of Calvary, and the following explanation is based on facts given to us in the Scriptures.

In some details it may not have happened just the way I have depicted below but it is worth a consideration and if readers have any observations we shall be pleased to hear from you.

Briefly I see it this way: Eve, while in the Garden and alone (for she ate of the tree first before giving some of the fruit to Adam) saw a serpent, or snake as we would call it today, on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and having been told that she must not eat of it or even touch the tree else she would die that very day, she watched carefully to see what would happen to the serpent. When the serpent remained unharmed she reasoned within herself, 'Can it really be that God has said we can eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Did He really mean that we would die in the very day we should eat of it or even if we should so much as touch the tree? Surely this is a tree to be desired to make us wise and we shall be as the angels; we will not die.' And when she considered these things in her heart and saw that the tree was pleasant to look at and good for food and a tree to be desired to make her wise, she took of the fruit and ate; and then afterwards she went to Adam with some of the fruit for him to eat.

We know that Adam ate of the tree for a different reason to Eve, for Eve was deceived, Adam was not, as we are told in 1 Timothy 2:13. No doubt Adam realised Eve's fate and was in a quandary as to know what best to do. Some time previously he had named all the animals that had been brought to him and amongst them there was no suitable help-meet found for him. Then God caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam, took a rib from his side and from it formed Eve. Adam, upon seeing Eve said, 'now at last this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.' They were the perfect couple and if ever there was a marriage made in heaven, this was it. Adam loved Eve, but now, because she had eaten of the forbidden fruit, he knew he was going to lose her. What was he to do? What would you have done? Maybe with hindsight you would have suggested something different to what Adam did next, which was to share her fate by taking also of the fruit of the forbidden fruit. Even as Jesus, through love for His people, wept over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37), so perhaps Adam wept over his bride and gave his life to be with her in the short term; though in contrast to this we see that Jesus gave His life to be with His bride for ever.

After taking of the fruit, God met them in the cool of the day and they were fearful for they knew the penalty. The responses of Adam and Eve in the conversation which followed as recorded in Genesis 3 were not ones of defiance but of contrition. Had it been otherwise God would not have had mercy on them, but in the event He took pity on them and did not put them to death but changed their circumstances to a second probation under different conditions. We can reason that Adam would have been given eternal life through perfect obedience to the will of God had he remained sinless, but in this he failed. So now we see he was offered eternal life through faith and forgiveness.

However, the first thing that was necessary was to offer up a sacrifice which involved the shedding of blood and Adam and Eve were required to wear the coats of skins made from the slain animal(s) thus illustrating that there could be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.

But the sacrifice in Eden was only a temporary measure for the blood of animals could not take away sin; God provided the solution - this taking away of sin was to be done by a sinless person who would freely offer up His life blood without compunction in Adam's place. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

We do not believe in vicarious punishment but we do wholeheartedly believe in self sacrifice and this is what we see in Jesus, that His sacrifice was one of substitution as we see from the type - the sacrifice for sin made on the Day of Atonement under the Law of Moses.

We could expand on this further by showing it was after the resurrection that the Apostle Paul was chosen to give us more information and explanation of God's ways for he showed that Adam sold himself to sin as a Master and as a result, all his descendants were therefore under the condemnation of the Law of sin and death. It is worth noting that life is passed down from father to child so that when Jesus was born His life came direct from God and not through the Adamic line and so Jesus was free of this Adamic condemnation. In this respect He held a similar relationship to His Father as did Adam at the time of his creation for we see that Jesus was not under the second probation. Both were Sons of God, but Jesus did not sell Himself to Sin as a Master, i.e. He did not fail in His probation, and so He was able to lay down His life in redemption of Adam's life.

Paul also explains what we call the Federal Principle of the two heads for mankind. Adam, the head of natural man and Jesus as Head of spiritual man. All in Adam die, while all in Christ are made alive. First that which is natural, afterwards that which is spiritual. That is why it is necessary to come out of Adam and be born again into Christ by baptism so that we are Christ's at His coming. When reading Paul's letter to the Romans we see that he refers to those in Adam as being in the flesh and those in Jesus as being in the spirit. He also refers to those in the flesh as carnally minded and those in Jesus as being spiritually minded.

Paul tells us that there is no judgment against those in Christ Jesus, for the Law of the Spirit of life has made us free from the Law of Sin and Death. To be carnally minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Romans 8:1,2). And as there is no judgment against those in Christ, they are raised immortal as taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:42-46 and Revelation 20:6.

Russell Gregory.

We reproduce the following article from an old Circular Letter:

An Examination of "The Christadelphian Experience"

(See "The Testimony" magazine of January 1984)

During the controversy between Christadelphians and the Nazarene Fellowship which has now gone on for over 100 years, one of the great obstacles to establishing the truth is the fact that the community is based upon a library of literature which dates back to about 1850. This literature is preserved with almost the same reverence as the Bible itself and although there have been quite a surprising number of corrections and revisions since the originals were written, we believe it has been conclusively proved to be defective in the one vital issue between us. Nevertheless, every new generation of Christadelphians is schooled in the expositions which Dr. Thomas elaborated in *Elpis Israel* and they sincerely believe that these are sound and scriptural when in fact they are fallacies.

We and others have many times explained the textual, grammatical and doctrinal mistakes which are involved in the view that sin became literally implanted in human flesh at the Fall and not only have quite a few people abandoned Christadelphianism entirely on this account but many more, while honestly admitting that they can see there are certain errors have felt that they have so much of truth as compared with most other sects that they have never felt the need or found the courage to come out. One recognizes the strength and attraction of a numerous and prosperous community which during its existence has evolved into an entity with a life of its own almost independent of its membership and this can be a peril even when it is founded upon sound doctrine - as can be seen in the warnings in the Epistles to the early churches. If, as we believe is the case here, the basis of doctrine is unsound in any particular, then the protection and inviolability afforded by a strong community makes the perpetuation of error inevitable.

Christadelphians understand very well - none better - how difficult it is to persuade a Catholic to contemplate the possibility that his worship of the Virgin Mary is wrong or a C. of E. member to accept that man is not an immortal soul, yet they are themselves quite as impervious to the possibility that Dr. Thomas was mistaken in his teaching that sin is literally in our flesh. The consequence is that as new younger writers

and speakers come along they are directed by their leaders or go of their own choice back to Elpis Israel or Robert Roberts and, supposing them to have stood up to the test of time and largely unaware of the controversies there have been, happily reproduce them and do their best to justify their conviction, even if, as we sometimes suspect the brighter ones are conscious that something is not quite right. This is exactly what is happening again today. The Testimony has produced a special issue for January 1984 and a group of capable writers have produced a full study of The Atonement. Unfortunately it is not a study of the Bible doctrine of The Atonement but of the Christadelphian doctrine of The Atonement and these are by no means the same things. Sadly, but unsurprisingly, it commences with the exposition given by Dr. Thomas where he wrote, "Sin could not have been condemned in the body of Jesus if it had not existed there."

We believe that it has been demonstrated beyond a doubt and on many occasions, not only by ourselves but by independent Bible scholars of good repute that this is a very great error. Sin did not and could not exist in Jesus' body because that is an impossible thing, but that did not mean that sin was not condemned when He died. Sin was condemned but it was condemned in the same way as it was condemned under the Mosaic Law - when the Priest made an offering of a legally clean and perfect lamb; sin was condemned by Jesus suffering in His body the punishment due to sinners. Reg Carr makes no attempt to reason the thing out from the Scripture; he is content to quote what Dr. Thomas wrote and clearly this is what he believes but we suggest it is time they ceased merely quoting what others have written and applied their own reasoning to the facts.

It is a certain fact that what Dr. Thomas asserted in 1850 has since proved to be defective, but it may well be that in the state of knowledge at that time his understanding could have been sufficient to constitute him a saint in Christ - we may hope so. But for another, a century later with better education and the benefit of other peoples' work, to pin his faith to a fallible man and reject the scriptural reasoning of his own brethren which would teach him better is surely to qualify for condemnation. He has read our various works quite carefully as his quotations prove but he rejects our conclusions. This he has a perfect right to do but one wonders if he fully realizes that he is making a choice which bears on the future life and if he finds himself rejected by the Lord because he has been content to accept a totally wrong and dishonouring concept of the life and death of Jesus, he will have no one to blame but himself. He has written a reasonably fair account of Edward Turney's teaching and although he speaks of it as illogical he does not show how or where it lacks logic. We feel that even the tendentious treatment he gives will not prevent some of his readers recognizing that Turney explained The Atonement with an elegance which, in the event reduced his adversary to fury.

Take his exposition of Romans 8:3. We read "God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh." Edward Turney pointed out that the adjective "sinful" is a wrong translation - it is a possessive noun and should be rendered "sin's flesh." If you are seeking Green's hat you don't necessarily look for a Green hat. It may be a black one "but it belongs to Green. Thus the translators allowed their biased belief to colour their translation and Dr. Thomas appears to have accepted it quite uncritically, probably no doubt influenced by the Christian tradition of his earlier associates that the Fall was supposed to have changed man's nature. In fact he rather worsened what was already bad enough by the gloss he put on in his assertion, "inasmuch as this evil principle pervades every part of the flesh, the animal nature is styled "sinful flesh," that is "flesh full of sin." Why did he not ask himself the obvious question "Why does Paul say in the "likeness of sin's flesh"? If Jesus had to be flesh full of sin what is the significance of the word "likeness"? The answer is because Jesus, although identical in flesh and nature with all other humans, in fact Himself belonged to God, because God gave Him His life direct whereas we belong to sin because we descend from Adam who sold himself to sin. The word likeness therefore indicates that there is a distinction between men of the same nature but of different legal relationship. Is it not obvious that if the purpose of God to save mankind required that Jesus should belong to sin in the same sense as we do, that He should have been Joseph's son? Had He been so He would have been no different in nature because He was a man, but He would not then have been legally qualified to give His life in a sacrifice for us.

Here we come bang up against the other side of the Christadelphian dilemma. When such a writer has to face the question of why Jesus was the Son of God it explodes in his face and obliges him to contradict the very first basic truth that our Saviour was made and tempted in all points like as we are. Reg Carr quotes Robert Roberts amazing words:-

“Being then invested with human nature - being ‘made sin (nature) for us, who knew no sin’ he was a fit representative sufferer. But it was also necessary that He should be holy... If Christ had been a son of Adam merely He could not have sustained this unblemished character.”

This is a bottomless pit of contradiction and falsehood; it reveals a chasm which no honest exposition can conceal. What does it do to the reputation of Jesus who trod the winepress alone, who suffered being tempted? What does it do to our conception of the justice of God? It does two things, either one of which is fatal to true faith.

First it implies that there is a contradiction amounting to foolishness in the way the Creation is organized, for, having created man good and in the image of God which we take to indicate his independence and free-will’, to be fruitful and exercise dominion over the whole creation and clearly with no more than a limited span of natural life, He (God) then caused his nature to be changed to evil thus sentencing him to death. It does not improve things to believe as some do, that the evil was the work of the Devil or the effect of his disobedience, for whatever was the cause, ultimately God alone could have caused it to be. His purpose only makes sense on the hypothesis that in his original very good state man was corruptible and subject to temptation and that we are still in that state. We are certainly as God has made us and if it were true that we are sinful flesh then God has made us sinners and ought to take the blame. This is what we mean when we say that Christadelphianism charges God with foolishness. Nothing we do or can do can change our nature. If it was ever changed then God did it; commonsense and reason tell us He did not. The Testimony fudges the issue but it won’t go away!

Secondly, if Jesus could not have sustained an unblemished character had He not been the Son of God as Robert Roberts affirms, then there could have been no genuine virtue in His perfection. He could be no example to us because it implies that it required some Divine element in His nature to enable Him to obey the commandments and any sinner could complain, “If I had been a son of God I could behave myself better.” It is a view which robs Jesus of all the honour due to Him for His suffering and endurance, makes Him little more than a puppet and reduces His life and probation to a pretence. It is a view which no sincere lover of Christ could entertain.

Worst of all perhaps is the way it makes a mockery of Divine justice, for it implies that Jesus, coming in the sinful nature that God created, being tried in all things and overcoming, is then required to suffer death, and a death in a more cruel and terrible form than even the very worst of (most) sinners, in order to be delivered from His sinful nature - when He had lived a perfect life! What kind of Justice is that? If it were true that God required Jesus to be put to death because He was sinful nature the Atonement would be the most terrible demonstration of sadistic cruelty it would be possible to invent. This is what these people attribute to our God. They may scorn us and disregard our contention that God did not work to bring about the crucifixion – it was the crime of evil men carried out of their own will and volition but which God foresaw, standing back and allowing it to happen for the sake of its effect on us and our salvation. But if they will take no notice of what we say, why do they not hear what the Apostle says? “Ye, by wicked hands have crucified and slain Him, a man approved of God.”

It simply is not true to say - as Carr does - that from the earliest days of the brotherhood there has been no lack of clarity or certainty about the community’s understanding of the nature of Christ. On the contrary, it has been a subject of controversy almost from the beginning, just as in the wider world of Christendom it goes back to 400 AD and Pelagius. There were in fact barely 25 years between when Dr. Thomas published *Elpis Israel* and the controversy of 1873 and no one knows how much discussion there may have been in this period before David Handley brought it into the open. It reveals a very mistaken impression of the time scale to say there was no lack of clarity or certainty, for it could only have been for a comparatively short period that the view that Jesus was sinful flesh prevailed unchallenged, whereas it has been an issue in debate and division for 4 or 5 times as long. His account would give Testimony readers the impression that we are questioning interpretations accepted during all the history of the Truth, whereas what Dr. Thomas says on the subject appears to us to have been written rather “off the cuff” than researched and carefully thought out as many of his expositions clearly were.

Reg Carr has clearly studied the literature carefully, both Christadelphian and ours but he has either overlooked or chosen to ignore some of the important admissions of his own brethren. For example, John

Carter wrote (quoting from memory) that it was wrong to use the phrase sin-in-the-flesh as if it were a compound noun describing a quality of human flesh. This it is not. He was honest enough to recognize that in its context it does NOT mean that flesh contains sin but that Jesus condemned sin while He was in the flesh, that is, while He was a man of our nature. Yet here is Reg still using it in exactly the same way as Dr. Thomas when he wrote, "Sin in the flesh is hereditary" - just what John Carter said we ought not to do. Admissions of this kind do not in themselves prove anything, because even the best expositors can be mistaken, but they do serve to shew that quite eminent and recent writers have recognized that there are faults even in Dr. Thomas. It would have reflected more credit on The Testimony if facts like this had at least been mentioned, even if it is impossible to explain them away.

The assertion that in his reasoning that as descendants of Adam men are under the dominion of Sin Paul was saying that our flesh is full of sin is really complete nonsense. When Adam was created very good his flesh was not full of sin, but he could be tempted and could commit sin, because that is what he did. He thus became a sinner, or in the scriptural usage, sold himself to or under Sin as a master who henceforth held him and all his children under bondage. That left us all, legally sinners and alienated from our Creator, but it did not fill our flesh with an evil principle, and given that we know that Jesus was the same flesh as we are, yet without sin, it cannot possibly be right to say that He or any other man is physically full of sin. When the annunciation was made to Mary, the Angel said, "That HOLY thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Reading these words, how does any responsible expositor dare to write "The law required the death of the transgressing nature, viz. human nature;" or, "It was necessary that the sinning nature should suffer in Him;" or "There was no injustice in His death; it was not wrong for Him to die"?

Reg Carr writes that many of the fallacies in Turney's arguments were high lighted by Robert Roberts. As we see it the facts are the other way round; the fallacies are those stemming from the Christadelphian view that because Jesus came in the likeness of flesh of sin, therefore He was of sinful nature and needed to die for His own redemption, and while it makes good propaganda to say that Turney reverted to some of the main elements of orthodox Church teaching on The Atonement, it has to be said that some of the elements of Church teaching are infinitely to be preferred to some of the errors of Christadelphianism. If one had to make the choice, I feel that it would be less reprehensible to worship in Church than with my former brethren. I am not likely to be found doing either, but with all their egregious Trinitarian-follies at least they honour Jesus as the Prince of Life and Saviour of the World in a way which no Christadelphian, who sees Him as our brother representative suffering Justly because of His defiled nature, can possibly understand.

We would invite The Testimony writers to re-consider a bit; to ask themselves a few simple questions instead of being content to re-affirm these horrible errors of the past. One assumes that they have minds open to reason and that if someone said to them "Ye do greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" and offered them some sound proof, that they could accept it; but they would need to think for themselves without fear of the consequences.

Brother Ernest Brady.

Final extracts from

"The Devil and Hell of the Bible":

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

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

Before we go into detail, let us summarize the meaning of the narrative. First it is a parable covering briefly the entire plan of salvation. The Rich Man represents the segment of the covenant-makers who are satisfied to go their own way through life without recognising God or His authority over their lives. They

are content to “eat, drink and be merry,” with no thought of the day of Final Account, or just retribution. They eat at the Lord’s Table of the doctrinal truths He offers, allowing the “crumbs” - the details of practical Christian living - to fall to the ground. On the other hand, Lazarus recognises his critical spiritual condition - full of sores, spiritually speaking - and craves the “crumbs” of correction that the rich man spurns.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A RICH MAN...

Jesus begins (Luke 16; 19): “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.” Jesus is dividing those who come to eat at the Lord’s Table into two classes - faithful and unfaithful. The term “rich” as used in the Bible does not necessarily mean rich in houses and lands and gold. A man may be rich in his own estimation, proud, rich in evil, rich in his own ways. In Revelation 3:17 we read of those who say they are rich: “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked.” Here Jesus is speaking of those who prove unfaithful, those who think they are right in God’s sight but are not. They are blind to their status with God. They do not realise their serious condition, that they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind;” that they are “naked” because not clothed with the robe of righteousness, the fine linen clean and white. (Revelation 19:7,8).

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

...AND LAZARUS

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

SPIRITUAL SORES

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

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

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

What is the cure for these sores? We read in Psalm 107:20, “He sent his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” The Word of God is the healing medicine. It tells us how to put away our pride, foolishness, sensitiveness, and every evil. “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?” (Jeremiah 8:22). Excellent healing oil is available for all who will apply it: “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.” (Psalm 141:5).

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

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

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

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

DOGS - EVIL MEN AND WOMEN

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

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

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

HELL, THE GRAVE

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

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

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

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

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

TORMENT v. COMFORT

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

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

A GREAT GULF FIXED

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

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

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

THE RICH MAN’S PETITION

Now we come to another scene of the parable; the rich man asks that Lazarus may be sent to his father’s house, to warn them of the destruction that will come upon them if they resist Christ’s authority.

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

Abraham is represented as answering the rich man’s plea unsympathetically: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” The rich man replies; “Nay father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.” (Verse 30). Here is the key to the whole subject of this parable - “If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.” It is after the resurrection from the dead, for the rich man wants someone who has been resurrected to go and plead with them.

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

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

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Postscript

During the past year we have been reading extracts from a lengthy dissertation on “The Devil and Hell of the Bible” produced by an un-named person presumably belonging to the Megiddo Mission Church. I have found them very interesting and instructive as I hope other readers have too.

I think the arguments set out gained particular strength from the fact that they did not appear to be coming from any denomination with an axe to grind, or an obvious determination to force a certain set of doctrines on to the reader. The explanations were put forward clearly and concisely and always with deference to the Biblical context. The result produced was one of consistent clarity and reasonableness that anyone with an open mind could grasp easily and appreciate, provided of course, that they are prepared to accept the Bible as the only source of truth, and the writer of this exposition is clearly one of that number.

The writings differentiate effortlessly between beliefs that are fable and tradition, which for some inexplicable reason most of Christendom prefer to cling to, and the simple Bible truths about the Devil and Hell that are obvious and entirely convincing once you delve just a little into the way the Bible uses language. Admittedly this takes some exercise of the intellect but it is well rewarded with gems of truth.

I think one person must have produced this study for I cannot imagine a group or committee managing such a feat of excellence but whoever wrote it, it deserves high praise.

Helen Brady