

Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No 219

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Editorial

Dear Brethren and Sister and Friends,

I am sorry to have to report that Sister Helen has not been in very good health for some weeks now and she has asked if I would write the editorial this time. May I take this opportunity to say how much we appreciate the favourable comments we have received about Helen's interesting editorials which have been like a breath of fresh air to us all, not only for their variety but for the welcome break from our all too constant disagreement with Christadelphian doctrines. Regrettably, I haven't her flair, so please get well soon, Helen.

We do not very often see "The Christadelphian" magazine but a Christadelphian friend sent a copy of the Editorial for last March asking what I thought of it. Frankly, I was saddened but not surprised by it.

Early on in his piece the Editor quotes, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8: 9). Then from this, he draws three remarkable conclusions:-

- a). Jesus "was rich, yet He was poor."
- b). "In any other circumstances this paradox would make no sense."
- c). "In the case of the Lord we know exactly what it means."

As Paul never said that Jesus was rich yet poor, it follows that there is no paradox! So we are left wondering what it is the Editor "knows exactly" about this non-existent paradox?

Paul said that Jesus became poor; the Editor said that Jesus was rich yet poor. Let us see where this one small twist or turn around of Scripture takes us, for it seems that the editor needs a paradox here in order to lend support to the real Christadelphian paradox of "that holy thing... the Son of God" – being a defiled Christ, as we shall see.

First let us see what Paul is telling us in this chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians; he is commending the Corinthians for their great generosity in giving so much to their less fortunate brethren and he takes the opportunity of comparing this with what Jesus has done in laying down His life for us.

We quote again, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he (Jesus) became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Jesus was not poor, He was rich,

very rich, indeed richer than any other man in that He had an unforfeited natural life (and I emphasise the natural life here because the Greek word, *psuche*, refers to natural life and never to eternal life) which no other man since Adam ever had.

An unforfeited and natural life had been given to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and this made Adam rich, but he transgressed God's Law and forfeited his life, that is, he sold himself to sin as his master and so lost his riches and became poor and poverty stricken. Jesus, on the other hand, being rich as Paul says, gave His natural life (*psuche*) in sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, and this is when Jesus became poor, not by transgressing the Law but by laying down His life (*psuche*) freely for our sakes that we, through His poverty, might be rich, that is, that we should possess unforfeited natural life. Jesus sacrifice - the voluntary laying down of His natural life (*psuche*), was given in place of the life (*psuche*) that Adam forfeited in Eden. By this means, Jesus gave hope of eternal life (Greek – *zoe*) to all who will accept Him as their Redeemer and be baptised into the death He suffered. His natural life is the price Jesus paid which made Him poor. This is when He bought us with His precious blood (natural life is in the blood). This is when He redeemed us. This is when He paid the ransom price of our release from our captivity of the Law of sin and death. All these payments - purchase, ransom, redemption and sacrifice speak of substitution – and was the voluntary payment Jesus made which we could not make for ourselves. And Jesus did not make any of these payments for Himself. He did not buy himself, He did not redeem Himself, He did not pay any ransom for the release of Himself from captivity to the Law of Sin and Death and He did not sacrifice Himself for Himself – and neither did He receive back the natural life (*psuche*) which He laid down at Calvary. He rose again with eternal life (*zoe*). John 10:10,11, "I am come that they might have life (*zoe*) and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life (*psuche*) for the sheep."

But the Editor of the "Christadelphian" in pursuing his line of argument, wishes us to accept the Christadelphian doctrine of sin in the flesh, that "as a member of the human race, the Lord's own deliverance from all the effects of humanity depended on his acceptance of the path of life of "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29).

In order to show what "all the effects of humanity" are, from which Jesus needed delivering, the Editor quotes from an article of Robert Roberts which, he also says, "harmonise all the scriptural accounts of Jesus' work of salvation":

"Supposing the case were leprosy instead of sin, and the cure to be passing through fire instead of death; but that the fire should only possess the power of cure where the disease existed without the virus of the disease, and that in all other cases the effect of the fire should be to destroy. Let the leprosy be death in the constitution, brought about by sin, and the virus, actual sin itself.

By this illustration, all mankind are under the power of leprosy, which cannot be cured by the fire, owing to the presence of the combustible virus, which will catch fire and destroy the patient. If only one could be found free from the virus, he could go through the fire and save the rest: but he cannot be found. God interposes and produces such an one among them, one in whom the leprosy exists without the virus, that the rest may be cured by joining hands with him after he has gone through the fire. He goes through the fire 'for them'; but is it not obvious that he goes through it for himself in the first instance? For if he is not delivered from the leprosy first, how will his going through the fire avail them? It is 'for himself that it might be for them'."

The Editor goes on, "Jesus was thus provided by God to answer the needs of sinful mankind; and these needs could not have been met satisfactorily by any other means."

So we now have these three claims by the Editor for R.Roberts article :-

a) it is supposed to "harmonise all the scriptural accounts of Jesus work of salvation."

b) it is supposed to “answer the needs of sinful mankind” and

c) “the needs of sinful mankind... could not have been met satisfactorily by any other means.”

However, once we see that “where the disease existed without the virus of the disease” is utter nonsense because you cannot have a virus without the disease, then there is nothing left of Robert Roberts article except a vacuum leaving his problem, and the Editor’s, without a solution.

And now what happens to the Editor’s three claims? The Scriptural accounts of Jesus work of salvation are not touched upon, therefore the needs of sinful mankind are not met by this means, and these needs which the Editor says could not have been met satisfactorily by any other means, have indeed been met by other means, but not in any way that is acceptable to the Christadelphian mind.

The poverty of the Christadelphian teaching on the Atonement has again been convincingly expressed.

Before concluding this editorial, we would mention that in recent correspondence and conversations with Christadelphians, we have heard expressions of dissatisfaction and restlessness, and it seems to us that most Christadelphians would admit the B.A.S.F is Victorian and outdated, urgently needs revising, that it ought to be brought up to date, contains many errors, and they want to move on from these errors but nevertheless feel they can say nothing, but accept in silence that there are others in their midst who believe the B.A.S.F. to be true.

Amongst the dissenters are a few brethren and sisters, prayerful and careful students of the Bible who have had their eyes opened to the unassailable truths taught in Scripture concerning why Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, who will not accept the falsehoods taught in the Christadelphian literature and the Statement of Faith, and seeing these errors, they want to make changes, only to be accused of causing disharmony. And in the course of the last six months or so it has been brought to our notice from several sources that pressure is being put upon a number of ‘straying’ ecclesias of the Central Fellowship to bring them back to tow the party line regarding the sacrifice of Christ.

The Central Fellowship say that they are trying to keep unity and harmony within the ecclesias, while the ecclesias concerned call their efforts “witch hunts”!

To us this looks like bullying to bring about harmony!

May Jesus come very soon. With Love to all in Jesus.

Russell.

WHO HATH BELIEVED OUR REPORT AND TO WHOM IS THE ARM OF THE LORD REVEALED?

To borrow a statement uttered some sixty or more years ago, and use it in relation to the Atoning Work of God in His Son, “Never has so much been done since the year 1873, by so few for so many.”

History proves that Christadelphianism began with a mixture of truth and error, but on the subject of the created nature of Adam, Dr Thomas, their first pioneer and teacher was correct in his belief that the first man Adam, was created corruptible, that is, capable of dying if left to himself as God created him. Here I say the term “mortal” should not be used of Adam at creation in that it means “Subject to death by Law by a legal sentence,” on account of disobedience known as sin.

The Apostle Paul declares, “By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin” – he does not say sin entered into the flesh, how could it if sin is transgression of Law? And how could Paul say it passed upon all men if they were unborn and incapable of committing sin when not under Law? Rather than accept the Legal position Adam came under by his sin, and that God had, for a loving and merciful reason concluded all under sin yet not being sinners, the unscriptural theory was adopted, for want of understanding Paul’s teaching in Romans 5, that sin was hereditary in the flesh. Paul never taught such nonsense but sadly much of his teaching is misunderstood and the mistranslation in Romans 8 has been the main cause, plus an excuse for many for their wrongdoing and lack of will power to resist temptation.

It is exposed in an extract from the lecture “The Sacrifice of Christ” by Edward Turney that David Handley, in 1871 wrote a letter to Robert Roberts with certain theories on the subject of Redemption. This was published in the November “Christadelphian” Robert Roberts having six months to consider it and to accept it if useful, but he did nothing about it. However, it caught the eye of Edward Turney who could see more sense and logic in what was being highlighted, and in consequence of further study of the subject, began to air his views in the company of other Christadelphian members. As a result of these views spreading to others in Birmingham, Edward Turney was requested to go to Birmingham and address some of them on the views he had gained.

Consequently, there were about twenty brethren waiting to hear him and I can say that it was well known that no one has read in, or heard in his lecture any statement that Jesus did not come in the flesh. Yet it is strange this accusation came from Robert Roberts and we have David Handley confirming Robert Roberts’ view that Jesus was not a mere man, a fact which is recorded of R.Roberts in Nazarene correspondence where he says we Nazarenes make Jesus a mere man; our belief being “If Jesus was tempted in all points as we are He was bound to be a mere man, the only difference being His relationship to God, not being born of the will of the flesh and neither was He under “The Law of Sin and Death.”

It is stated by Edward Turney that R.Roberts had six months to consider the matter sent to him by David Handley and had been ignored, but Edward Turney having considered it and improved on it through deeper study of the subject related to the sacrificial typical animal sacrifices under the law was moved to make his views known and furthered those views in his Lecture “The Sacrifice of Christ” the reading of which convinced me of the correctness of the views I had come to after 17 years a Christadelphian. If I and my wife had not resigned membership we would have been barred by a documentation that none understood and do not to this present day – the B.A.S.F.

It was not until he wrote the treatise “The Two Sons of God” that Edward Turney came to realise that natural decay and death was not the penalty passed upon Adam for sin but a legal sentence involving death by bloodshedding, a teaching made to abound clearly through the rituals of animals slain under the Mosaic Law who had their fulfilment in Jesus, their antitype. Even Dr Thomas believed the penalty for Adam’s sin was his exit from the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life and allow his already corruptible nature to take its limited course and return to the dust from which he was made. But Scripture proves this to be a result, not a legal penalty for his sin. Much more has been said on this subject by those who were contemporary with Dr Thomas and R.Roberts proving from Scripture the confused state the latter had brought Christadelphians into not only about Jesus and His sacrificial death but on the subject of Resurrection and Judgment.

In more recent times it came to our knowledge of one William Ellis who with several others accepted the views E.Turney was putting forth and from then on there has always been a few who could see the logic of Turney’s reasoning from the Scriptures and were invoked to write much on the Atoning work of Christ, of judgment preceding resurrection, and the false theory of sin in the flesh and condemned flesh rather than condemned character. Andrew Wilson, nephew of Benjamin Wilson author of the Emphatic Diaglott, was a qualified expounder of Nazarene views based on the Scriptures, then followed men like F.J.Pearce of South Wales, Ernest Brady of the Midlands, both making a large hole in the Christadelphian wall daubed with R.Roberts’ untempered mortar which they are still using to this day.

St Paul saw in a vision by the Spirit a man of Macedonia who cried, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." A cry has now come from a Christadelphian source in Australia "Come and help us in our efforts to bring about the unity of the Spirit lacking in the great divided state of Christadelphia world wide, before the coming of the Lord." An admittance that they are not united or even have the Spirit.

After all the correspondence and literature sent out to help people see the errors they have embraced as 'The Truth' and such help being misrepresented and scorned, can you imagine for example, Michael Ashton asking Nazarenes to heal their wounds to be in better spiritual health to stand before Christ? I conclude with the statement made at the beginning of these comments:

"Never has so much been done since the year 1873 by so few for so many."

Phil Parry.

Once again we look back and reproduce an earlier Editorial:

EDITORIAL APRIL 1972

Loving greetings in Jesus' name. It is several months since I sent out the last Circular Letter, which was accompanied by a copy of the pamphlet dealing with A.H. Nicholls' article "For Whom Christ Died". This has resulted in a lot of correspondence and requests for other literature, particularly from Australia, where bitter controversy is raging and division and disfellowshipping are already taking place. The immediate issue, which has been taken up by The Logos Magazine, is A.H.Nicholls' statement that it is unseemly to speak of Christ as defiled, cursed or condemned and he is now in the dilemma of explaining why it was never regarded as unseemly to refer these terms to Christ by Dr. Thomas, R. Roberts and other leading Christadelphians right down to this day.

If the Christadelphian Community were what it believes itself to be, the true Church of Christ, it would be a sad spectacle to see it tearing itself to pieces with internal conflict, but what is happening today and its history is plain proof that it is not what it thinks itself. It may be that amongst its members there are and have been some of those "living stones" that go into the building of the true church, but as a community it is no more than one of the many sects of Christendom. We think that in total they may have a greater proportion of truth in their teaching than some others but by their obsessive rejection of any real sacrificial principle in the Atonement they nullify much of what they profess and make themselves worse enemies of the Cross of Christ than any other denomination we know of. Not only so, but in some of the things which are being done in the name of what they call The Truth, they are out-doing even the Roman Catholic Church.

In a letter to Recording Brethren headed "The Peril of Division" A.H. Nicholls says:

"if the tragic situation were to develop, it would bring with it the break-up of ecclesias and families, the estrangement of friends in Christ, the disruption of all our inter-ecclesial activities, chaos in the mission field, and the fuming away of some from the Faith."

We can only say that if all these things happen it will be the very best thing possible for all those concerned - it would be almost exactly what Jesus himself said would be the effect of the Gospel. The more division and controversy there is the better hope there is of some Christadelphians coming to a true understanding of why their entire history has been one of division and disfellowshipping. A.H.Nicholls also says,

"In this message we are not concerned with the rights and wrongs of the situation, but solely with the possible consequences if division comes about."

What possible purpose is to be served by dire warnings and pleadings if one is not concerned with rights and wrongs? This has been the tragic history of their troubles - if earlier editors had been more concerned with rights and wrongs and less with defending the false basis they inherited - he himself would not be in his present dilemma. They seem incapable of learning - even while he is pleading with brethren not to accept one side or the other he says,

“Subject of course to acceptance of our Basis of Faith.”

This is the very root and cause of all the trouble - a basis of faith which defines human flesh as literally full of sin and Jesus as under condemnation because he was a man. This is the right or wrong which is leading to division and A.H.Nicholls is naive enough to imagine he can help by concerning himself only with the effect and not the cause.

This teaching comes from Dr. Thomas, who wrote in *Elpis Israel* (p.114) that sin could not have been condemned in the body of Jesus unless it had existed there. It was elaborated by Robert Roberts in *The Slain Lamb* and was the subject of the first major controversy and division. It was embodied in *The Statement of Faith* as a fundamental Christadelphian doctrine and, because it is wrong and now so often recognised as wrong it has been the recurring cause of strife and division.

The present trouble is originating in Australia because a large majority there were influenced by John Bell, who accepted Edward Turney's conclusions in regard to the nature of man and in *The Shield* he poured scorn on those clauses in the *Statement of Faith* where the sentence upon Adam is said to have defiled his nature by the implantation of sin so that all his descendants inherit a bias toward sin. So far as I know however, John Bell did not go all the way and accept the logical outcome of Edward Turney's teaching when it comes to *The Atonement* and he regarded the Cross as no more than a martyrdom, as the evidence that Jesus was faithful unto death. Years ago I had considerable correspondence with several very estimable brethren holding these views, amongst them W.R.Maxwell, and I think he came to accept our views before he died but he valued his Christadelphian associations and realised he would lose them if he openly accepted the Nazarene view and he always wished me not to mention his name if I made use of anything he told me.

The Re-union of 1957, when nearly all the Australian ecclesias agreed to accept the B.A.S.F., largely put an end to what was known as the Clean Flesh fellowship and for the time being silenced those who disagreed with the doctrine of defiled flesh and a condemned Christ. Few realised that the Carter-Cooper Addendum, which they supposed was an acceptable modification of Clauses 5 and was in fact a subtle deception and no more than a cleverly worded re-affirmation of exactly the same things, whereas there had been a certain tolerance and room for different opinions in the several sections which had existed, re-union walled up the whole Community behind the bars of the B.A.S.F. and the heresy hunt could commence, in almost medieval detail and severity.

This is the position today, with H.P.Mansfield in the seat of Chief Inquisitor and his emissaries busily collecting the evidence for the charges formulated in *The Logos*.

All the troubles of the Christadelphian Community are traceable to one thing alone; they have never been able to see the death of Christ as a true Sacrifice. Because of their false foundation, Christ Crucified is to them as great a stumbling block as it was to the Jews; because they will not consistently apply the principles of sacrifice and redemption in the Mosaic system, the Cross is to them the foolishness that it seemed to the Gentiles to whom Paul preached.

They talk of it as a sacrifice (and I have no doubt that many simple brethren and sisters in their hearts feel it as such) and they regularly read the passages in which we are told that it was for us, that he bore our sins and laid down his life for our salvation, but when they explain their belief they do not scruple to declare that it was first for himself. This is understandable from those extreme filthy flesh-mongers of *The Logos* group which stands fast upon Robert Roberts' statement "It pleased God to require the ceremonial condemnation of this sin nature in the person of a righteous possessor of it, as the basis of our forgiveness"; but it is very difficult to

understand why so many of those in Australia who rejected the doctrine of physical defilement were still not able to perceive that Jesus did not have to die to prove himself pleasing to God and that His death was something extra - not required - the voluntary sacrifice of His own life as the ransom price for the life of sinners.

I think the explanation is that in their bitter, almost fanatical opposition to Edward Turney the early defenders of Christadelphianism - Roberts, Andrew, Hadley and many others, persistently and scornfully - perhaps even hypocritically, charged him with advocating that theory of the Atonement in which God's wrath against sinners had to be appeased by the infliction of punishment before He would show mercy - so-called substitution - punishing the innocent in order that the guilty may go free. No one with a proper sense of justice or scriptural concept of the Creator could accept such a view - and it ought to be evident that in the R.Roberts statement quoted above there is the very thing they objected to - unjust punishment - since surely ceremonial condemnation of a righteous man to death because of a sin nature he was born with can never be justifiable. But there is most definitely a principle of substitution in all sacrifice, which can only be defined as the giving up of a thing for the sake of another that is higher or more urgent, and if we cannot see it we can never understand and appreciate what Jesus did for us when He steadfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem knowing the fate that awaited Him.

If at any time during the past 80 years they had been honestly wanting truth they could have had it – but they did not want to know. All they were really concerned with was to defend the Basis of Faith - the same as A.H.Nicholls today. All they wanted was to prove that they were right, that the “pioneers” had made no mistakes and to do this they were prepared to go to the length of tampering with their writings, lying about their brethren and they cared not how or whom they misrepresented. They stumbled at the stumbling stone - Jesus, who loved us and gave Himself for us has become a rock of offence on which their ship is foundering.

I send loving wishes to all, especially to many who have been afflicted so much during these winter months and our prayers for that time of healing and renewal to which we look forward at our Lord's return.

Your brother in Jesus name, E. Brady

From the Missionary Field

While we have every good reason for criticizing Christadelphians for their false beliefs, we do however admire the work of so many of their number in the mission field. Here is just one report, one of so many that would fill volumes:-

Then there is the problem of our beloved Sister Aleksandra, a stalwart in the faith for 14 years now. She is housebound, and it costs about US\$50 to get a doctor to make a home visit, let alone the high cost of medicines for her heart, kidney and many other complaints. There is no lift in her block and she can't get down the 6 flights of steps - she'd have to be taken down on a stretcher. All her shopping has to be done for her. Her pension is barely enough to pay the utilities, let alone anything else. We made a recording of her story, and here is a summary transcript:

Can you tell us how you came to the Truth?

It's such a long story, I think there was not a moment in my long life when God was not present, to bring me to Him. Maybe it started before the war, in our village, my mother was a believer, but all I can remember was that she would sit in a corner and read from her Bible, and take bread and juice with a covering on her head every Sunday. This was Stalin's time, it was illegal to have a Bible or go to church. It left an impression upon me from a child.

Did she tell you anything about the Bible? Did you read with her?

No, not that I can recall. But then there was the war. My father went away to the front, and we never saw him again. The Germans came, and we ran into the forest. We watched them burn the village. Our houses were made of wood and they burnt easily. They started at one end of the village; it was just houses down a street. They stood at one end of it and started, we were standing there in the trees watching. They say, when you are old you can remember the past better than you can recent things, I suppose with me it is true, as I remember all that as if it was yesterday. I see it all still. I don't know why, but I ran back across the fields to our house, and went inside and took the Bible, it was 2 volumes, Old Testament and New Testament. I have it here with me still. Published in 1917 in what was Petrograd, what became Leningrad. The men were shouting at me to come back, but I ran quickly. I took the Bible and ran back to the woods.

And then what happened?

Well how we survived the next 2 years I don't know. We went deeper into the forest, we were village people, we loved our village, and it was burnt to nothing, and Germans were passing that road all the time, moving towards Leningrad. We made shelters in the forest, in the ground. It was the Winter of? 1941, or 1942, I am not good with dates. The temperature was so low that year. It killed many Germans, but it killed many of us too. We had few clothes, we lived on berries, we were always feeling sick and weak. My little sister died there in the forest, and then my mother. We buried them as best we could. We Russians are religious people, we have God in our soul, despite the Stalin times, the atheism etc. In the forest we were often talking about God. We prayed to God, we tried praying together, and I often prayed on my own. The older people remembered how the churches were before 1917. They said we must light candles for God to hear us. We had no candles, but we lit bits of pine twigs and cones, they burn well. I remember thinking, why will God hear us, because we lit candles? I wondered whether if we had real candles, God would hear us, but I decided He wouldn't. When I lost my mother and my little sister, and saw our neighbours some of them literally freeze to death, I had strange feelings about God. I knew more than ever that God is there, but I so wished I could understand Him and that He would save us. I tried to read the Bible I took, but I couldn't understand it. I buried it, wrapped it in cloth, at a certain place in the pine forest.

So how did you survive?

Only by God's grace. I was one of the few from the village who survived that time. You can see, how I have chronic arthritis, rheumatism, heart problems, it must go back to those long months sleeping in our shelters in the forest, living on whatever we could, even we boiled tree bark. We used to walk many kilometres to find villages which might give us food. But Stalin had ordered to burn everything to give Germans nothing, actually nobody had food. A whole group of us were captured. I was a teenage girl. They took us to a railway station near a town, I am not even sure what town. I heard a language other than Russian for the first time in my life. We were in a big group with other prisoners on a railway platform for ages. The men said, "They will kill us, and they will rape you". We were such country people, I had never heard the word rape, I could only guess what it was. I prayed and prayed to God. I said I would do everything for God and love Him always if He would save me. Then, the guards changed shift. The older women said, to run, that it was better for us girls to run than to remain as prisoners. So, we just ran across the tracks. Believe it or not, I could run fast then. Now, I can barely move around my apartment. But then, I could run. We ran through the gap left by the guards who were changing shift, and the other guards shouted at us, but I just kept running, I was thinking only, "God, please, please, help me". We got to some woods and then we looked back. I suppose they thought we weren't worth bothering with. Then we heard shooting. Probably the men and older women were all shot on that railway siding. I never saw them again. We got to a village, and they told us that Germans were leaving, that we were winning. It didn't seem like it, everyone was hungry, everything was burnt and ruined. Eventually I got to Leningrad.

So how did all that influence you spiritually?

I was so grateful to God for saving my life. I so wanted to love Him, to give myself to Him, but I can't really explain, this huge feeling like a cloud over me, that I didn't understand Him. I asked Him to tell me about Him, but there seemed no answer. I remembered my mother reading her Bible alone in the corner before the war. I wanted to be like her. I want to say to you, as testimony, I so love my mother. I do not know what she believed or how she believed, but I hope she will be in the Kingdom of God. Anyway, as I said, there was this terrible feeling at the back of my mind, that I so wanted to know God, but, I couldn't seem to find Him. I went back to the forest and dug up the Bibles, those two volumes. They were a bit spoilt but you can still read it OK. I have kept them with me all my life.

Were you angry with God for all you lost?

No. I was never, ever angry with God. I know people get angry with God about death, loss, but even in the forest, when I heard people both praying to God and cursing God, I never had that feeling. All I remember was thinking that we were supposed to be atheists, but there in the forest, people were thinking of God, to pray to Him or even curse Him. I only ever prayed to Him and wanted to know Him and was confused by Him.

Did you get involved with any church?

Not really. I remember that thing about trying to burn candles in the forest, so that God would help us. It always seemed to me that our Russian Orthodox church wasn't right. Something was missing there, if God only hears you if you burn candles. Of course, I wondered whether the Orthodox church could show me the truth about God. When I got to Leningrad, I met the man who was to become my husband. We decided to get married. He was a good man but a product of Soviet thinking and Marxist-Leninism. I said I wanted to have a marriage blessed by God. I asked him how we should do this, he said he didn't know, but he understood we had to have a priest to bless us and not just some paper from the registration office. I found a priest, or someone who said he was one. He said he would give us a secret ceremony. But he wanted some bottles of vodka to do it. I brought him the vodka the day before we were to meet. We went to him the next day, and he was drunk, but he did some sort of ceremony for us, said some words from a prayer book and burnt some incense. I knew in my heart this wasn't the true church. By then, the USSR had taken over Latvia, and we were sent to live in Riga. I took the Bibles with me. We were given jobs and an apartment, it was wonderful for us after what we had gone through. And so began the decades of life in Soviet Latvia. I worked, we had our children, we lived normal life. It's all like 5 minutes for me, from a spiritual point of view. I used to try to read the Bible, I prayed to understand it. I met with people involved with the underground churches, but to be honest I was scared to be involved with them, I didn't want to be taken away from my children and sent to a camp. I never told people I had a Bible, it was my secret. My desire to know God never left me, but it seemed as if the door was shut.

So how did you come to be a Christadelphian?

In 1991, Soviet occupation ended and Latvia was free, all controls on religion and possession of Bibles were lifted. I then saw an advertisement in the newspaper, offering a book called Bible Basics that would explain the Bible without the need for churches and traditions. I knew this was the answer. I wrote to England, it was my first letter to a Western country in my life. I wrote in Russian and I hoped they would understand. I received my copy, and I read it over many times, and started reading my precious Bible using the Bible Companion. Everything started to get clear. I received a correspondence course, and I sent the answers to Duncan in Vilnius. Then I had a letter from Duncan, that he was coming to Riga and would like to meet me. I met him, and brother Vladimir Tuyev. We spoke for a long time, discussing all things, and Duncan said I was nearly ready for baptism, and I should study more, and he would come again to see me. I then started feeling that I was not worthy to be baptized, that I am too old. I had a dream, where Duncan was baptizing me. It gave me strength, to know that actually I was worthy enough to be baptized. Duncan came again, and we had a long discussion about all the doctrines, and he passed me for baptism. I put on my best dress and met Duncan and some other brethren at a sauna. I had difficulty moving my legs even then, because of my arthritis. We had worked out that I could not be completely covered in water in our bath tub, and I so wanted it all to be done properly. The brothers lowered me into the sauna, and lifted me up out again. So, I was baptized!

So can you tell us about your life as a Christadelphian in the Riga ecclesia?

When Duncan and Cindy moved to Riga, they used to pick me up every Sunday for the meetings. I always enjoyed meeting with the ecclesia and the discussions about the daily readings. I was given tracts advertising Bible Basics, and I used to walk down the stairs to the entrance to our block. We have no lift, it took me about 10 minutes to get down the stairs and about 20 minutes to climb back up again. I put the tracts in the letterbox rack at the entrance to our block. They were my missionary journeys. And I write to many people telling them about the Truth and sending them literature. But now I am too sick with my heart and other problems to even go out of the apartment [I live with my daughter and son-in-law]. Cindy comes round to see me every week to take my blood pressure and bring me medicines and break bread with me. I love her so much. I know I am with the true family of God. I phone every Sunday to see how the meeting went, as now I can't get out. My pension is so small I can't afford the medicines prescribed, it is enough only for my share of the food and utilities on the apartment. When I can, I ask my daughter to buy biscuits so Cindy can take them to the meeting and the others can have them when they have tea during the break, so they remember me. What I like most about Christadelphians is the way of reading from the Bible Companion. It means I can keep in touch in spirit with all the others who are reading the same chapters each day. I read the portions three times each day. I write down the verses I like the most in a diary. I am worried that I am so forgetful, and that my sight is going, I need my cataracts fixed, but they say I am too weak to have it done. I just worry that what I read in the morning, I've forgotten by lunchtime, and so I re-read the portions, I hope God forgives me. I pray a lot, I look out of my window and pray, that Jesus will come soon. I am dying, I know I am, if Jesus doesn't come soon then I will die. But I am very tired of life, I can hardly move from my room to the kitchen or the toilet, what I know and believe is that I will rise again. I only would like that written on my gravestone, if you don't mind to arrange it. I have found what I was looking for all my life, I wish I had found it earlier, but it was as God arranged it. I believe in the gospel of the Kingdom of God, the Elpis Israel, as it says in that book. I read that book a few times, you see I have not so much to do apart from to pray or read, and I believe all that, that Jesus is going to come, and I will be young again, and I will be able to give myself to God wholly and not with all the limitations I've always had. All I can say to God and to you is thank you, thank you, thank you.

[This interview was recorded in Russian, in between many tears, and this transcript has been edited for clarity, as there were several repetitions].

More extracts from a Christadelphian forum:

Dear Brother Y,

It is the term defiled flesh that is so objectionable. Let's go back in history. The doctrine of Original Sin was introduced into the early Church about 4th century AD. It had its origin, not in Jewish history, nor in Christian history but in Persian history and some say it can be traced back to Babylon and the time of Daniel.

Anyway, when it was introduced into Christian teaching, the Church leaders felt it necessary to also introduce the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in order to exclude the Son of God from its defilement. This defilement being a changed nature of Adam's flesh when Adam sinned, who was supposed to have been in some superior state when created and placed in the Garden of Eden. It was this teaching of defiled flesh that the early Christadelphians accepted and, because they rejected the Trinity, they said Jesus too must have had defiled flesh.

Clause 5 of the B.A.S.F. claims these things to be facts: That Adam broke this law, and was adjudged unworthy of immortality, and sentenced to return to the ground from whence he was taken - a sentence which defiled and became a physical law of his being, and was transmitted to all his posterity.

It is this imagined defilement of our flesh which some say became a physical law of our being, and transmitted to all flesh, including that of Jesus, that is so vile - and in my opinion it is blasphemous. This is strong language, I know, and I don't say it to cause offence, but it is how I see it.

Because some say that Jesus had this defiled flesh they also say that He had to die to get rid of it. But, this is nonsense. In the first instance, Jesus did not have defiled flesh and in the second, it would not be necessary for Him to die in order to be changed to immortality - as will happen to those faithful who are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord. To say that Jesus had to die to get rid of his sinful flesh leads them to say He had to die for Himself, but this takes away all the honour due to Him and destroys all His altruism and Isaiah 53 is reduced to rhetoric. Besides which, no one has ever found a passage in Scripture which tells us that Jesus had to die.

Over the last century, brethren and sisters have argued over Clause 5 and because they don't like what it says, have tried to make it mean something else. Consequently, Christadelphians have developed a language of their own by which they can say half-truths, confuse their terms and then claim they all have the truth as taught by Jesus. No doubt, there are many readers who will say I am exaggerating wildly - but I don't think so.

You mention our righteousness as being like filthy rags. No descendant of Adam (and Jesus was not a son of Adam), however perfect his character, could save himself. Paul explains that the descendants of Adam are all concluded under the one sin of Adam for the purpose of salvation by one sacrifice - that of Jesus, the Lamb of God. This salvation has nothing to do with physical flesh; it has to do with the development of character. Even as our righteousness has nothing to do with our physical flesh but everything to do with our characters.

That Jesus was also of our corruptible nature means that He could be tempted in all points as we are. The fact that He lived a sinless life in corruptible physical nature shows there was nothing wrong with that nature, and so Jesus could reasonably and honestly condemn sin by showing that we too could do the same and that corruptible nature could not be held as an excuse.

You say that: The very fact that we get tired, sick, lonely, hungry, etc, seems to be an indication, you say, that we are not to be compared with our Creator's greatness and purity. Of course this is so. We are made with the potential for greater things than we have here and now. But you go on to say that those who say Jesus was defiled simply mean that Jesus was corruptible - that He was not of divine nature. But if this is what they mean, then why do they not clearly say so? Perhaps for fear of being excluded from the table of the Lord? So they use roundabout language to stay in fellowship? Or am I being a little cynical here? I fear I am not.

Again, you say that Jesus while He lived as a man, was ever in the grip of the flesh He wore and the possibility of sin. So that makes His struggle and yielding and victory so real and so wonderful.

While I would never wittingly undervalue the achievement of Jesus in giving His life for us, as the sacrifice to take away our sins, I would not say that He was ever in the grip of the flesh, and I believe that in continuing to overcome all His temptations, He rejoiced to do His Father's will. I cannot see how He was in the grip of the flesh while He was rejoicing to do His Father's will. Rather is it the case that our temptations are our opportunities to show our love for God by overcoming them.

Finally you ask, Does it matter if some, as many do, view Christ as defiled in being a participator in the human condition?

Why ever should anyone feel defiled for being a participator in the human condition? It just doesn't make any sense. We are fearfully and wonderfully made by our Creator so how can our human condition be seen as defiled? We defile our characters when we sin; we spoil our relationship with our Creator when we offend Him, but defiled for being a participator in the human condition? Never!

I believe the reason why the Roman Catholic Church is called the Mother of Harlots is because she has made an unlawful union of Scripture with false doctrines. Every Offspring Church has taken on board one or more of those doctrines and Christadelphians are not exempt from this in their use of the Doctrine of Original Sin. A teaching that detracts from all that Jesus taught as well as from what He accomplished at Jerusalem.

You quote what Jesus said, that “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts. These are the things that defile a man.” The flesh we live in is good wholesome, human flesh as God made it in the beginning.

In Romans 7 Paul is using flesh as a symbolic term for the time before he was in Christ, i.e. in the Spirit, as he confirms in Romans 8. Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. They were obviously still in bodies of flesh and blood.

Yes, it would be acceptable to say that Christ was not defiled by His nature - and that does not depend on whether He sinned or not. Adam’s nature didn’t change when he sinned in Eden; our nature didn’t change the first time we sinned and so this link of a changed physical nature with sin is misguided nonsense.

As I think you know, I don’t believe there is any halfway house or to put it another way, one cannot jump over a gate and stop half way! We cannot accept any shade of Original Sin doctrine, or any watered down version of it.

I would ask all our readers not to be offended, please, by what I say. I do feel strongly about these matters and say what I believe to be true, though I am always open to reasoning from the Word of God.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

Brother Y did not agree with some of the above in his response, to which I replied:

Dear Brother Y, I see three different matters here in your reply:

1. The physical change of Adam’s nature - also referred to as the defilement of the flesh.
2. The natural weakness of the human body making it prone to illness and injury.
3. The defilement of the mind – that which comes from the heart - Jesus said “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”

Regarding (1), there was no change whatever in the flesh of Adam due to his transgression. In Scripture we read of two natures – Spiritual and natural. Those who say there was a change in Adam’s nature have to assume a third state for Adam at Creation in order for there to be a change from some superior nature about which we are told nothing.

Regarding (2), the frailty of our bodies is natural and is as God chose to create us. (I suppose we could say it was necessary so that we cannot depend upon ourselves). This frailty allows for suffering, whether it be from illness or injury (and here I think we may include mental anguish), and is also used by God for part of our testing; as a trial of our faith - or perhaps as a warning - or correction - or punishment. For others it is a matter of chance – “Time and chance happeneth to them all.” Ecclesiastes 9:11. Nevertheless, our bodies are the vehicles in which we live – it houses our minds - our bodies, with all their frailties, are very good for this purpose. Very few are blessed with continued good health for the whole of their lives. Most suffer hardships to some extent at some time or other.

Regarding (3) the defilement of the mind or character – this is legal defilement – the imaginings of the heart that lead to sin. Sin is transgression of law and where there is no law there is no sin. Sin is therefore a legal matter. Therefore, forgiveness of sin is a legal matter. Grace is not outside of law; it is the merciful provision of God within the law.

You ask, “Why did Christ need His Father to save Him from death?” I see some ambiguity here and the simple answer is, surely, because He was laying down His natural life. Who was there to raise Him to life besides God? I would also say that Jesus did not have to die. He was never a sinner. Jesus also had a free life – that is to say, He was “not concluded under sin.”

Secondly you ask, “Being made perfect, if His was always perfect what was the making of his perfection?” In answer to this, I quote from an article in the Nazarene Fellowship magazine for 1954 where the writer answered your question in this way:–

“I would rather say He was previously unperfected than that He was imperfect. A cracked vase is imperfect; an unfired one is unperfected. The answer to the question, I submit, is in Hebrews 2:9-17:- “made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death... to make the Captain... perfect through suffering... in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.”

Hence the perfection of Christ in this chapter, is the being tempted as we are, suffering the same trials and troubles as we do and thus being able to succour those who call upon Him, knowing by experience what human nature and its circumstances are. He took not on Him the nature of angels (verse 16) else He could never have done this. Or take Hebrews 5:8.9:- “He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and being made perfect. He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.”

There is another sense in which the Lord Jesus Christ was unperfected in His earthly nature - that referred to in Philippians 3:12 (and perhaps in the verse just quoted) - “Not as though I were already perfect.” Paul here refers to the resurrection of the dead, I take it (verse 11). But there are various ways in which the Scriptures refer to perfection - “Be ye perfect” (Matthew 5:48); “If thou wilt be perfect” (Matthew 19:21); “Till we all come unto a perfect man” (Ephesians 4:13); “As many as be perfect” (Philippians 3:15); “For by one offering He hath perfected for ever” (Hebrews 10:14); and see also Colossians 1:28; 4:12; John 17:23; 13:10; and other places, all from the same Greek word, TELEIOO, and all translated as “perfected” in the A.V.”

To conclude - when Jesus allowed His murderers to nail Him to the Cross, Jesus submitted to a penalty He did not deserve and a condemnation which was utterly unjust, in order to cancel, by the surrender of His own life, the debt owed by sinners. Jesus paid at Calvary the debt incurred in Eden. Had it been inflicted upon Adam the sinner, he would have perished and the human race would never have been. Jesus, being sinless, was able to suffer the death and not perish; and being raised from the grave in incorruptible spirit nature, He ascended to His Father and now awaits the appointed time for His return to reign upon the earth. Thus God provided in His own Son the one all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, a life for a life, and purchased back to Himself all those who put on the name of Jesus who are alienated from Him.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

Comment from another –

From Brother X, “You’re telling me, Russell, that God chose to punish an innocent man for a guilty man’s sin?”

And my answer to Brother X: –

Dear Brother X, “Therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down my life for the sheep.” Does this suggest to you that God chose to punish an innocent man for a guilty man’s sin?

The penalty Adam incurred was judicial death, and we read that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. Natural death is not a sacrifice. If an Israelite broke the law, he was required to bring a lamb to the tabernacle, lay his hand upon its head and confess his sin. The lamb was then killed.

No one denies that the sacrifices under the Mosaic Law were substitutionary for it is self evident. And surely no one denies that Jesus is the Anti-type of those sacrifices. How then can some Christadelphians deny that Jesus sacrifice was, in same way, substitutionary, or even be so perverse as to say that His death was required by God for Himself due to His supposed sinful flesh?

We say that Jesus took away sins upon the same principle as foreshadowed in the Mosaic Law - by transfer of the penalty from the guilty person to the innocent victim, who bore it in his stead. The sacrifices under the law could not take away sin because they were not voluntary.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.” And Jesus gave Himself for this purpose. Why is there such a horror of the idea of Jesus dying in our stead? It was not an act of revenge; God was not punishing Jesus with death because Adam sinned.

But the idea that Jesus had to die because He had defiled flesh is totally without scriptural foundation. To punish a man for someone else’s sin is unjust and to punish a man for the nature he bore would also be unjust.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

But Brother X didn’t agree so again I wrote:

Dear Brother X Thank you for your post. Supposing I had run up a large debt, say a £1,000,000 or so and was quite unable to pay off that debt, and now the bankers were demanding payment, what could I do? I could do nothing to save myself from my situation but would expect to be put in prison.

Then you, being the wealthiest member of my extended family, being very kind and very generous, didn’t want to see me in prison nor see my family suffer for my mistakes, so you paid my bankers, telling them that you were paying them the amount of money I owed.

Do you think the bankers would still want payment from me as well?

Not being an inspired gospel writer this is about the best analogy I can think of and it certainly illustrates my understanding of the work of God in Christ.

In such circumstances, do you think you would feel the bankers had punished you instead of me?

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

And then another writer to whom I replied:

Dear Brother A – Re. Post 30: In Micah 6:6-8 you refer to one of the most delightful passages of Scripture and it should be our joy to live by it – but it does not affect my allegory in the previous post. And regarding “without the shedding of blood there is no liberty” - this is perfectly acceptable to me.

That “the blood was for our benefit, not God’s” doesn’t need further comment. But I’m not sure about “our natural minds... the one that kept us slaves, is the one that needs payment before we are free.” This isn’t the way I see it.

However, my little illustration did not depict God as demanding payment – I did not consider the ‘bank’ as representative of God.

Has it never occurred to you that perhaps it was not God who demanded payment but that in a sense, it was God who made the payment? God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, and that unto us a Son is given? What does it mean that Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world? Surely, it was in the mind of God even before Adam’s transgression that He would send His Son into the world – the Lamb of God - to take away the sin of the world.

I agree with you in your reply to Julian (post 32) where you say “the one who holds you captive is the one that demands payment.” Ever since Adam transgressed in Eden, the human race has been held in bondage by the law of sin and death. This is the law Jesus freed us from. Redemption took place on Calvary. “Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

The Apostle Peter tells us, “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but quickened in the spirit.” The simple and obvious meaning of this text is that Christ suffered the penalty of sin for us, on our behalf or in our stead. Jesus escaped none of the consequences of sin but bore them all – not for Himself but for us.

Can we stretch our imagination far enough to conceive of the righteous One - who loved his brother Adam, and wished to save him, saying, “If only my brother can be spared, in order that the law may be met, I will take his place and bear the penalty in his stead - I shall not perish because I have done nothing worthy of death”? Is it too great a strain to imagine that there could be anyone found thus willing to lay down his life for his friends? Does it seem so utterly unthinkable that a just and merciful God should have accepted the loving sacrifice of One who was not under condemnation as a means of our reconciliation?

Again I agree with you where you say “The price of our freedom is (or was) paid by Jesus blood – but it is paid to that which held us captive – not to God.”

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

After a further response from Brother Y, I replied -

Dear Brother Y Re. Post 33: It would indeed be difficult to write one’s understanding of the death of Christ in just one paragraph. I know you have but if I may say, I see very little about how we are reconciled to God in your piece.

The nearest to it in my opinion is in “The Nazarene Fellowship understanding of The Atonement” which I posted on the 10th April – a short article of about 1500 words. If you wish I could try to condense it a little but this would lose some of its important content, I feel.

I agree that this subject gets very complex and in the last 20 years, I have spent a lot of time unravelling a multitude of contradictory Christadelphian arguments, pointing out their errors and putting something better in their place. Frankly, there have been times when I have found this to be wearisome, and then unexpectedly I receive a letter saying how delighted that person is to see the truth of the matter at last! Then it makes it all worthwhile.

The Atonement is really quite simple to understand if people will be satisfied with easy explanations but in my experience most seem to want something complex and preferably with a little mystery thrown in. Strange, but true.

I do not hold out any hope of a generally accepted view before Jesus comes again, but we must not give up praying for our understanding to be opened.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

Brother X responds again, to which I reply:

Dear Brother X, You, like Brother A, have read more into my little analogy than was there when you supposed that the “bankers were ungracious and unforgiving wretches, who had no mercy for a man who was destitute.” You too, have personified the ‘bankers’ which is a word I did not use. Perhaps I expected too much. But I had hoped readers would have seen that the ‘bank’ represented the law of sin and death. This ‘bank’ (the law of sin and death) received the utmost payment it could claim and Jesus paid it for us, on our behalf and in our stead.

My own feeble attempt at analogy agrees with Jesus’ own analogy in Matthew 18:23-27, I am pleased to say though Jesus parable fulfilled a somewhat different purpose.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

Again, a reply to Brother X:

Dear Brother X, In post 60 you said:- “As I have pointed out, Christ’s own explicit explanation of the process of forgiveness directly excludes all ideas of a commodity exchange or vicarious payment.”

In saying this I think you are confused between forgiveness and redemption. Redemption was achieved for us at Calvary. Since then Jesus has been given charge over the human race to forgive whomsoever He will. Forgiveness does not require ‘commodity exchange’ but redemption must come first for that forgiveness to end in eternal life for the sinner.

Forgiveness without redemption is only a temporary reprieve as in the case of Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah. (The Ninevites were not offered eternal life for their repentance but were given a continuation of their natural life). If you take away the idea of purchase which Jesus made in the shedding of His blood then you take away any hope of eternal life for His disciples.

Redemption means to deliver by paying a price. Three Greek words used in the NT for redemption –

1. *agorazo* “to purchase in the market.” 2. *exagorazo* “to buy out of the market.” 3. *lutroo* “to loose or set free by paying a price.”

The ‘process of forgiveness’ as you express it, involved Jesus first of all in the voluntary laying down of His life in place of Adam’s life before we could be forgiven. It is for this reason we are told that without the shedding of blood there is no remission.

With Love in Jesus. Russell

Next we have a reply from Brother X in which he gives a choice of analogies

Scenario One: A man comes into a shop. He is desperate for food, without which he will starve. He states his case honestly and openly to the shopkeeper.

Shopkeeper: So you have money?

The man: No, none at all.

Shopkeeper: Well I'm afraid I can't give you any food.

The man: But I'm starving! I know I can't pay, but can you have compassion on me?

Shopkeeper: I do have compassion! My heart's overflowing with compassion! But the rules of the shop say that I can't give people food unless they give me money.

The man: Who's shop is this?

Shopkeeper: Mine.

The man: Who makes the rules?

Shopkeeper: I do.

The man: Well then, can you give me some food, even though I don't have any money? I'll starve otherwise.

Shopkeeper: I'm sorry, my heart bleeds for you. I'd love to give you food, but the rules of the shop say that I can't give people food unless they give me money. Please understand that it's not me which is preventing you getting the food, it's the rules. They say you owe a debt for the food which must be paid, even if you can't pay it.

A third man comes into the store. He buys some food. He sees the other man looking desperate.

Third man: You look hungry.

The man: I don't have any money to buy food.

Third man: That's terrible! Here, I'll buy you some food (buys food).

Shopkeeper: Wonderful, the debt is paid. Here's your food.

The man: Great, I can eat! Wow, thanks 'Third man'.

Shopkeeper: And thanks to me also!

The man: For what?

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Scenario Two: A man comes into a shop. He is desperate for food, without which he will starve. He states his case honestly and openly to the shopkeeper.

Shopkeeper: So you have money?

The man: No, none at all.

Shopkeeper: Well I'm afraid I can't give you any food.

The man: But I'm starving! I know I can't pay, but can you have compassion on me?

Shopkeeper: I'll tell you what. I'll give you food, and you won't have to pay anything. I'll cancel the entire debt.

The man: Thank you!

Shopkeeper: But you must make a commitment to go and do likewise. When you have money again, find someone else and buy them food. Show the same compassion to others which I've shown to you, or I'll come around, find you, and collect the original debt.

The man: Ok. And thanks again!

The Question: Which of these shopkeepers was a righteous man?

My reply:

Dear Brother X, Oh dear! You have just done away with Christ altogether. Neither of the above scenarios are analogies of the gospel.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

After further exchanges I again reply to Brother X:

Dear Brother X, With reference to post 67, perhaps I may be excused for giving Scenario Three:

Shop-keeper, turning to his son: "There is someone about to come into the shop, starving and desperate for food."

Before he could say more the son says: "Father, I will make sure he receives all he needs."

Father: "Thank you, my son. I knew you would say that, and I truly love you for it."

And truly this is much, much closer to the way we see the matter.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

And a reply to Brother A:

Dear Brother A, Re post 77 where you wrote –"It is an interesting allegory - but if you check to see who gives gifts, whether life or spirit or grace, it seems to be always at God's hand that these are given. Jesus doesn't claim to do this. Jesus himself was God's gift to us."

Yes, I agree totally. Jesus would not claim the credit for Himself would He? It was God who provided us all things through His Son. This is simply seen when we consider that without Jesus, whom God gave, we would have nothing. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." Why was this? God provided Jesus with all that was necessary for us. God couldn't die for us. Jesus was given life and He gave this life to replace the gift of life that Adam forfeited to the law of sin and death, which forfeited life we receive from our forefathers through our parents. God gave a new life to Jesus - this was the reason for the virgin birth - an unforfeited life that Jesus could lay down to redeem Adam – as a ransom, to save him from the consequence of his sin.

Also, you wrote: - “the law of sin and death is not an entity that can be paid. It has no consciousness at all. The law only holds a person bondage by the process of their own natural mind.”

The law of sin and death is the law God gave to Adam in Eden - “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” By the grace of God, the human race has been held in bondage to this law for the purpose of blessing the faithful. Galatians 3:22, “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.”

I believe the law, any law, once broken, holds a person in bondage until it has been satisfied. Whenever a law is made, the penalty for breaking the law is also stated. A few years ago I was caught speeding. The law stated I had to pay a fine. When I had paid the fine the law was satisfied. More recently my grandson was caught without a ticket for his train journey. He couldn't pay the fine himself so his father paid it for him. Again the law was satisfied by receiving the payment stated even though the offender paid nothing.

You wrote:- “The payment was only ever a metaphor meant to reinforce the truth that we are truly loved and truly forgiven.” I say that payment made to satisfy the law is not a metaphor and neither did Jesus die for a metaphor when “the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

You wrote: - “That Jesus suffered for (our) sins, the just for the unjust, in no way implies that he suffered the penalty in our stead.” Well, I do not see how you can claim this. I believe that if one dies for another it does imply that the one dies instead of the other. Jesus said “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Ransom is the price paid by one person to release others.

You wrote, “He suffered and died in order to put an end the hold that our sins have over all of us who are unjust.” True, I believe this also, but I believe He did this by paying Adam's debt so that the law of sin and death has no hold over the faithful (though it remains its hold over the unfaithful).

You wrote, “If we had suffered the same penalty we would still not have freed ourselves from a guilty conscience, he didn't just take our place.” I agree with this – had we suffered the penalty we would have perished; it would have been the end of us. And neither did Jesus just take Adam's place. The Bible shows us He did far more than just that. The life we were born with is not our own but a life forfeited to sin. By suffering for our own sins means we die. Jesus life was did not originate from Adam but direct from God. This fact of the Virgin Birth makes all the difference. Jesus could lay His perfect life down in place of the perfect life Adam forfeited to the law of sin and death and there was nothing to bar His rising to eternal life. It should always be remembered that Jesus lay down His natural life in the blood for Adam's natural life in the blood. Nothing here about dying to give us eternal life, but to give us the opportunity of eternal life by coming out of Adam by baptism into Christ.

Thank you for your post, I hope what I have said here helps you and others to understand the Nazarene Fellowship views a little better.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

Again, a reply to Brother A:

Dear Brother A, Yes the scenario I put forward was an attempt to write Jesus into the story and if I seemed to show Jesus to be more eager than His Father, please put that down to my poor analogy. I see Father and Son working together as one, as Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.” (John 10:30).

You ask, “Could God not forgive sin even without the blood of Christ?” Yes, there is one example is where God was displeased with the people of Nineveh for their wickedness, who, because of Jonah's warning from God, repented of their evil ways and then God “repented of the evil that he said that he would do unto them,

and did it not.” (Jonah 3:10). So yes, in cases like this I would say that God forgives without the blood of Christ. However, in such cases, there is no offer or promise of eternal life to the people of Nineveh as a reward for their repentance - and it was for this purpose that Jesus gave His life - that faithful people should have the opportunity of eternal life.

You ask if I think God is bound by law or ritual? Yes, I am sure God does not go outside of His own laws and neither do I see how He could. Regarding rituals, I see these as set by God for us to follow as He sees good and will change them as He sees fit. For example, in this Christian dispensation we are not under the rituals which were imposed under the Law of Moses.

You say we are not under law. But how can this be? - “For where no law is, there is no transgression” (Romans 4:15), and, “for sin is transgression of law” (1 John 3:4). Therefore, if we are not under law then we cannot transgress or sin. Surely this is not so. Matthew 22:37-40 has not been superseded and the Ten Commandments are still our law.

We are certainly not under “institutionalised legalism that restricts free choice” which is the way I see Christadelphian ‘legalist’ look on those who, like me, say we are still under law.

You go on to say that “If we were under law, it would be the lawgiver that required payment – and God does not require payment.”

But God ask obedience to His laws, not payment for failure, so I think my answer to this is found in Deuteronomy 28:1, “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I commanded thee this day...” - then the nation would be greatly rewarded with blessing above all other nations and then in verse 15 we read, “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes...” - then they would receive evil at the hand of God. Verse 63, “And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.”

We are not under the Law of Moses but we are still told to love to do good and fear to do evil as the Israelites were. This has ever been the case since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God would rather see everyone do right and receive everlasting life, but He will not give life for evermore to wilful sinners. These will have their end in the second death – the judicial death – the death for sin, (which is not our natural death). Whether we call it payment or consequence or some other term, the result is the same, it is judicial i.e. as required by law.

It is worth noting that when, on the Cross, Jesus said “It is finished.” The Greek word, teleo, translated ‘finished’ is the same word translated ‘pay’ in Matthew 17:24 where “they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay (teleo) tribute?” It is reasonable to say that the last words of Jesus on the Cross could be translated as “It is paid.” I am aware, of course that this doesn’t have to be the meaning Jesus wished to convey, but it may be.

You say, “that there is no literal payment to anyone is self evident.”

But when a criminal is put to death for his crime we do not say his debt was paid to anyone. Such a person has broken the law and the requirement of the law has been settled by the execution of the criminal. No one received payment as such, though a settlement was made.

I appreciate that the point you were making is that Jesus did not take our place. However, I believe paid Adam’s debt and having done so, the whole race now belongs to Jesus as His purchased possession, to do with as He sees right. If that means forgiving the faithful then it must surely be seen that this is only possible due

Jesus having redeemed Adam in the first place. Our present life is our redeemed life. Our redemption is not future; our deliverance is future.

You wrote, "But the suffering that he shouldered was not what would have happened to us if he didn't?"

Was it not? Adam was told that he would die in the day of transgression. Because this death was the result of breaking the law, it was therefore a judicial death. Adam did not experience a judicial death but Jesus did. But Jesus did more than die in Adam's place; as a result of dying in Adam's place He also provided that we had our present life (obviously had Adam for his transgression he would have had no children), with the opportunity of life eternal through forgiveness. In this respect Jesus laid down His life for everyone and forgiveness is through Jesus alone. He forgives us – all judgment has been given to Him. He made our eternal life possible when He made Himself a sin-offering (Isaiah 53:10).

The official teaching of the Christadelphians is that natural death was the result of Adam's transgression and it is here that we disagree. There can be no meeting of minds once we start by taking a different premise or foundation on which to build our reasoning.

You continue by saying, "Nor was it something that we could have shouldered to the same effect for ourselves."

And this is absolutely true, and it is why Jesus chose to shoulder it for us. This fact is the substitution we preach and you have expressed it in the same way we do. I think in this you should rejoice for you have here pointed to the work of God in Christ. No sinner could do for himself what Jesus has done for him. That is, he could not die to redeem himself and this is because his life is already forfeit and when he dies that is the end of him. Without Christ he has no hope.

You say you have not read of Adam's debt to the law? So I ask, did Adam die in the day of transgression? The law required him to be put to a judicial death. But the animal (lamb?) was put to death instead in order to provide him with a covering for his sin. Adam did not 'pay' what he was told he should 'pay' as a consequence of his transgression. Instead, he was turned out of the Garden and allowed to continue his life under different conditions.

We believe that Adam and Eve were created corruptible, as were all living things, whether they are animal or vegetable. All were designed to live a natural life for a span of time set by God. A life span, in which they lived, reproduced and died, - as natural things always have done from creation. The transgression of Adam and Eve made no difference to this cycle.

Yes, there are a lot of variations now circulating in Christadelphia, far more than there have ever been, and I am told there are now over 35 divisions and I believe it.

Only prayerful and earnest study of Scripture will, by the grace of God, show us the truth. Proverbs 25:2 – "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter."

With Love in Jesus. Russell.