

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No.249

May/June 2011

In this Issue:

Page 1 Editorial	Brother Russell Gregory
Page 2 How to handle the Word of God	Brother Edward Turney
Page 5 How did the Death of Christ Destroy him that had the Power of Death?	Brother Ernest Brady
Page 7 BASF Clause 12	Brother Eric Cave
Page 8 Forum Discussion	
Page 13 Exhortation - "David, a man after God's own heart"	Brother Leo Dreifuss
Page 16 "I came down from heaven"	Brother Phil Parry
Page 16 "In the day"	Companion Bible

Editorial

Dear Sisters, Brothers and Friends, Greetings in Jesus Name.

It seems the gospel of the Kingdom of heaven was not clearly understood by Jesus' disciples for we find them asking, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They understood from the prophets that the Kingdom of Israel would be restored and Jesus confirmed this in the Lord's Prayer, but they didn't understand it was not to be at that time, and so Jesus told them "It is not for you to know the time or seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Their minds were focused on the political rather than the spiritual aspect of the kingdom.

The first Kingdom of Israel, established in Moses day became corrupted and faithless, finally coming to an end when Jesus was crucified and the veil of the Temple was rent from top to bottom signifying that the old covenant was ended. From that time on the children of Israel were no longer God's people.

However, the crucifixion of Jesus opened the way for all, Gentiles and Jews, to enter into covenant relationship with God through His sacrifice so that all who will may be baptised into His death. Now, after nearly two thousand years of Christianity, we ask, have the Gentiles been any more faithful in pleasing God than were the children of Israel? We read in Matthew 7, verses 21 to 23, of when Jesus comes again to establish His Kingdom; He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

These people had been teaching in Jesus name; they had "cast out devils" and "done many wonderful works," all in Jesus name. After all, Jesus cast out devils and did many mighty works and they were trying to emulate Him. So what did they do wrong, or what didn't they do right? Had they not been doing the will of the Father? Jesus said not, but "I never knew you. Depart from me."

Let us not deprecate good works nor loving ones neighbour as oneself. These things we must do as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5,6 & 7), "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16).

, Israel generally failed to see the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, which are the vital part of Christ's teaching, and the reason why is made very plain in the Scriptures, it was because their heart was not right in God's sight. They lacked the necessary faith, choosing rather to serve God in their own way.

In the letter of James 2:18- 24, we read, “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

But more than this, we must offer to God our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. By this we are acknowledging what God and Jesus have done for us. After all, “when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” (Luke 17:10).

Love to all, Russell.

How To Handle The Word

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the Jews had returned, from Babylon to Jerusalem, the priests found the long lost book of the law.

At the eighth verse of the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, we read these words, “so they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.”

This is precisely what all men who stand up as teachers of religion should aim to accomplish - to read distinctly, to give the sense, and to cause the people to understand the reading. It is to be feared that this method of handling the oracles of God is not sufficiently practiced; if it were we should hear more of certain grand and cardinal doctrines, about which the old apostles and the older prophets never grow tired of speaking and writing.

Many of our religious leaders have become weary of well-doing in this direction, and instead of reading the Word distinctly, instead of giving the sense, instead of causing the people to understand, they have substituted a kind of light reading and smooth moralizing of which it would be hard to say that it often instructs the people or stirs them to a deep sense of their obligations towards God or man

It is our earnest desire, while pointing out the almost universal departure from the good old path, to walk in it ourselves. Truly, my friends, it is a narrow path trodden by few, but those few have the assurance of Christ Himself that it leadeth unto life.

Some affirm that our Christianity is too intellectual. By this we presume, is meant that we demand of our brethren too large a knowledge of the Scriptures; that we should be content with a smaller amount of head work; that we should look less to the brain and more to the heart. We grant the possibility of a mind well informed in Scriptures’ truths and precepts with a heart not subject to their influence; but the common custom is to make too much of the heart, and too little of the head.

The design of Christ and His apostles appears to be that the head should be the guide of the heart; in other words, the reason and intellect should control the sentiments and propensities.

Paul declares, “for though we walk in the flesh, we do not walk after the flesh. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

We are familiar also, with certain sayings of Jesus both to His disciples and to the multitude; to the latter He was wont to say, “Hear and understand;” to the former, after teaching them, He would say, “Have ye understood all these things?”

Our adversaries think they see in us too great a proneness to a mere letter of the sacred writings, and a neglect of that highest of all morality. Well, let us not be offended but try by our actions rather than by our

words to convince them that they are in error. Certain of the Greek philosophers maintained that a man ought to feel more thankful to his enemies than to his friends; for his friends would hide his faults, but his enemies would expose them.

Whilst we are diligent about the letter, let us not be unmindful of the spirit of Christianity. He that has ears to hear, let him hear those rich harmonies which still echo from the hill sides around Jerusalem, from the temple and even from the blood-stained cross.

The sublime music rolls upon the ear with every breeze; the burden of it is “Love thy neighbour as thyself” “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”

How simple! How perfect! The world needs no complex system of philosophy and of morals; the balm for all her wounds, the remedy for every ill lies in the practice of this precept – “Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you.”

Another charge frequently brought against our preaching is that it is too controversial. We are bound to admit that in this particular our addresses do present a strong contrast to pulpit oratory in general.

The usual style of preaching may be truly said to be almost free from a controversial spirit. The absence of controversy from the preaching of this age must, if you read and reflect, make you feel that it is very unlike the teaching of Jesus and of Paul.

Controversy is quite consistent with all the graces of religion; there is no discord betwixt controversy and meekness. The deepest charity does not jar with a true and righteous spirit of religious controversy, for no man was ever so distinguished both for love and controversy as the man Christ Jesus.

Upon this subject there is in our day, strange misapprehension. It is a popular sentiment that where benevolence, love, and Christian charity exist and flourish, the tongue of controversy should be still. If we study the life of Paul we shall find all these dwelling together.

It would be difficult to show that any of the apostles were more eminent than Paul in all the virtues which made the bright and tender side of human nature in its best and loveliest development, and surely neither among the apostles nor any other class of preachers was there ever a more persistent controversialist than Paul.

It will be sufficient to cite one passage out of numbers under this head.

In 1 Thessalonians, 2nd chapter, and 2nd verse Paul writes:- “But even after that we had suffered before, and were shameful entreated, as we now, at Philippi; we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.”

While Paul contended and exhorted others to contend earnestly for the faith, he warned them against debate and contention in another spirit.

Paul’s contendings and disputings were prosecuted from pure and benevolent motives; the gospel demanded such warfare from him; but he was not like some who have been ready to take their side in dispute for the sake of strife; he was not like others who always manifest a spirit of contradiction, whatever subject may come before them.

Then let us beware of two things – first, that we do not evade an earnest contention for the faith once delivered to the saints, with the idea of pleasing men whose practice in relation to this duty is contrary to the example and precept of Christ and His apostles; and also that we do not foster that love of debate and strife which Paul denounces, and so give the enemy just ground for complaint.

The last objection we shall notice at present is that we are said to be too precise in doctrine. A full regard to this would open up what we regard as the grand doctrine of the Bible, namely, the personal reign of Christ over all the earth; but upon this theme it is not now our intention to enter.

Our opponents allege that we study doctrine and neglect the love of God and man. They assert that our religion is a religion that passes too lightly over morality.

No small responsibility rests with them as judges of us in this matter; but instead of setting up a defence of words against this indictment, let us endeavour to set one of works.

As regards doctrine, we will ask one question; Can you bestow too much attention upon doctrine?

We are of the opinion that you can no more pay too much heed, for Christian doctrine without Christian morals, will never give you life eternal in the kingdom of God, neither will Christian morality, without Christian doctrine save you from corruption.

Paul enjoined Timothy to “give attention to doctrine.”

Doctrine was one of those things upon which the apostle commanded Timothy to ‘meditate’ and to which he added, “give thyself wholly.” You will also observe that Paul was very particular about “form of doctrine.” On behalf of the believers at Rome, he wrote these emphatic words: “But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” (Chapter 6:17).

The tendency of this age as regards Christian doctrine, is not at all conservative; on the contrary, it is reprehensible and absurdly liberal.

Leaders and people alike are disposed to melt and fuse into one heterogeneous and shapeless mass of silver, the gold, the tin and the dross. They would feign relieve themselves of the arduous but profitable work of testing, by the searching fire of the Word of God, what is presented to them.

They wince before the penchant stroke of the weapon, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, whose edge and point sever and divide betwixt the inmost thoughts and intents of the heart.

They prefer bulk to quality.

An attenuated gold leaf over a large piece of wood is mistaken for a monster nugget of gold; thin layers of corn spread over heaps of sand are supposed to be piles of solid food; in the language of the Revelator, they exclaim “I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing” knowing not that they are “wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

To such we would say, listen to the solemn words of the Spirit, “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.”

Brother Edward Turney.

How did the death of Christ destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil”?

You ask me to comment on Hebrews 2:14. The question is, how did the death of Christ destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. The answer is: Jesus destroyed the devil by taking away his legal ownership of the human race. This is a strictly religious and legal content - I hardly need to say that we do not believe in a literal personal devil. The devil is the personification of Sin, which includes all things and people and thoughts which are in opposition to God. Adam sold the human race into Sin’s ownership and thus lost the right to life for himself and all descended from him. Jesus restored what Adam lost by living His own life as the equivalent of the lost life. He purchased the human race back to God by paying down His own life to discharge the debt which put us into the possession of the devil. This being accomplished, the power of death exercised by the devil over humanity was broken and the devil was destroyed.

This is a concept which requires a certain measure of scriptural intelligence to understand, and even modern Christadelphians are inclined to scoff when we explain it, but if you know your Bible you will know that it is the true explanation. Nothing I could write will improve on the words of Dr. Thomas in Eureka, Vol.1 he said, “Paul reminds the saints in Rome that they were all the servants of sin once; but thanks God on their behalf that they had been freed from sin and were now the servants of righteousness, having obeyed from

the heart a form of teaching into which they were delivered. They obeyed a form of teaching which emancipated, liberated, or set them free from the lordship of Sin. This was Paul's mission, to invite men to a change of masters. He addressed himself to free men and slaves, all of whom, whatever their political or social position, were in bondage to the Devil, or Sin. He invited Sin's servants to become Jehovah's servants, upon the principle of purchase, so that he says, 'Ye are bought with a price'. Redemption means release for a ransom. All who become God's servants are therefore released from a former lord by purchase. The purchaser is Jehovah; the price or ransom paid the precious blood of the flesh through which the Anointing Spirit was manifested. Satan took the price of release. In the day of his power he valued the blood at thirty pieces of silver. He nevertheless laid down His life to purchase their release from the bondage of sin and death."

I have copied this out in full because it shows in Dr. Thomas an understanding of the purpose of the Atonement which Christadelphians no longer have, although they still claim him as the originator of their faith.

When Jesus said, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me", he was referring to this personification principle. The Devil, manifested in the sinfulness of the world and its hostility to divine things and to himself as the son of God, had no rights over him, as it has over us, and He knew that He was in process of being handed over into its power to wipe out the debt of life for we who had nothing to pay with.

Why did God choose to embody His purpose in a scheme involving a non-existent adversary, the Devil? I believe it is because the plan of salvation had to be presented in a way in which it could be understood by people of varied background and intelligence. All things had to have something to picture, some person or thing which could be visualised. Thus theological concepts had to be attached to concrete images, persons or situations familiar to the minds of the place or period.

To us to-day ideas of law, relationship, alienation, justice and other such abstract concepts are familiar and it is these that matter in our relationship with God. In past ages the same things were taught and applied in parables and analogy – what we have to see is the underlying manifestation of our Creator's love in His purpose to save out of the wasting multitudes of the world such as will take the trouble to discover and accept His condition - faith in Him who loved us and gave himself for us.

Brother Ernest Brady.

Extract from a letter...

“I came down from Heaven.” “Before Abram was I am”

It came to me the other day that many, including yourself, have gone to great lengths to try to prove the pre-existence of Jesus in heaven because of his words, "I came down from heaven" etc., but that in doing so ignoring the words of Jesus in John 5:15. "And no man hath ascended up to heaven except the Son of Man who descended from heaven." (Emphatic Diaglott rendering).

If Jesus was pre-existent with the Father either in personal form or as spirit-part of the Father, He could not be said to have ascended, as He was already there. We must conclude therefore that at some time during His life on earth Jesus ascended bodily to heaven. I am more than ever convinced in my own mind of this, and to me it makes more sense. It was not an impossibility for Jesus to be conveyed to heaven; Moses was permitted to see God in a very limited sense, Exodus 33:20-23. All things are possible with God, and the very words of Jesus in John 6:36-43 seem to imply that although the people whom He addressed had not seen His shape or heard God's voice at any time, He had.

Mark well the words of Jesus throughout all His discourse in John, the importance He attaches to the word showing the Divine Authority of His mission. Compare Exodus 33:18-19 regarding the name of the Lord. Jesus the greater than Moses came in His Father's name, greater witness than that of John He brought with Him, works which the Father had given Him to do, to bear witness of the fact that God had sent Him. The word sent is used no fewer than five times by Jesus in John, chapter 5 and five times in chapter 6, and He is speaking of Himself as a person as the Son of Man; and please note verse 62 of chapter 6. "What and if ye

shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?" And again, verse 46, "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father." Note also verse 51, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Now Jesus could not have come down from heaven as flesh unless He first ascended to heaven, as He did not become a flesh-being until His birth of Mary. Again, in John, chapter 7. Jesus seems to give the impression that as a man He had had direct personal contact with God. Verse 14, "Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself (without God's authority) seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true and no unrighteousness is in him."

These are only a few thoughts on the subject for you to think over but I think there is more evidence for the view I have suggested than the "pre-existent" theory. At what time in His life Jesus ascended to heaven I cannot say but it is significant that at 12 years of age when His parents found him in the temple He said to them, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He knew then even that Joseph was not His real father, whether by revelation or personal contact I cannot say, as afterwards He went back with Joseph and Mary and was subject to them. I submit therefore that He may have had personal contact with the Father at a later date prior to being launched upon the world, at the time John was baptising in the Jordan.

This ascending to heaven is not a figment of my imagination, it is a possibility. Take the case of Paul - 2 Corinthians 12. If possible with Paul a follower of Jesus surely a greater revelation of the Father was due to the Son. Think further on these things. I am not dogmatic in my assumption, but I feel sure that this viewpoint dovetails more so with our view of the Atonement.

I am Yours, in Hope of Life with Christ, Phil Parry.

Comment on Clause 12 of the BASF

Clause 12 of the BASF states "That for delivering this message, Jesus was put to death by the Jews and Romans who were, however, but instruments in the hands of God." This is Calvinism at its worst. For it makes God responsible for the murder of His Son on the principle as John Thomas claimed "that what one doeth by his instruments he doeth by himself" (Ambassador, April 1868, page 117) and is not what Acts 2:23 or 3:18 are saying. The former reads, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken... and by wicked hands nave crucified and slain," and the latter reads "And now brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers, but those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled." The meaning is plain enough - God by His fore-knowledge had given Jewry His Son to be their Saviour, knowing that the people would kill him through their wickedness. In this their cup of iniquity was brought to the full, with the result that that murder has not yet been requited for by Israel. To say as Christadelphians do that God delivered him up to be crucified logically necessitates that Jewry committed no sin in crucifying Him and therefore brands Christadelphians as allies of the Jews who committed the crime.

Brother Eric Cave.

Discussion on Christadelphians Worldwide Forum:

We enter part way through the discussion -

Alan: John I think we may be saying the same and stumbling over the semantics of words. Of course our lives will improve, hopefully greatly improve, but the fact remains that God accepts only perfection and that is why only Jesus was acceptable. We are acceptable, not as a result of our effort, but as a result of Jesus perfection being given to us as a gift. Salvation is a gift not a reward for effort. We give God surrender and

out of that our life changes and improves and we try harder to please God but this is a grateful response to the salvation that is already ours. I know that I am saved because of Jesus death and so my greatest desire in life becomes to please and say thank you to my God by living in a way that brings Him joy. Perhaps I have to use the word that so many Christadelphians have trouble with. I am saved because Jesus died the death I deserved to die and gave me His perfect life in exchange. He was and is my substitute.

Justin: OK, Alan, I'll take the bait. You wrote, "Jesus died the death I deserved to die and gave me His perfect life in exchange. He was and is my substitute."

I always understood it was a representative death, not a substitutional one. Why isn't Jesus still dead? You deserve to be dead forever, so there isn't a lot of correlation between what we deserve and what happened to Christ.

Thoughts?

Alan: Jesus is not dead because death couldn't hold Him. It will also be unable to hold us. I doubt if we will reach agreement on this Justin as this topic is intertwined with other areas of belief where my thinking has changed. I have no desire to debate. You will understand that to leave friends, family and all you have stood for 30 years was not done lightly and only after a number of years of rigorous study and prayer...

John: Alan, you said "but the fact remains that God accepts only perfection and that is why only Jesus was acceptable."

I think this may be where our philosophical paths separate Alan. God accepts a desire to be Godly in those who love the things he loves.

I don't see Jesus death as accomplishing a legal change of status for mankind. Legalities are not realities. Our salvation has to do with our trust in the statement made by his death, that God does love us and that he will keep his promise to us.

Perfection is not what is required - but it should be our desire - and we should be growing towards this out of love for what is right and in the power of the spirit of Jesus.

Alan: Fair enough John

Russell: Justin, you said, "OK, I'll take the bait" and quoted from Alan's post that 'Jesus died the death I deserved to die and gave me His perfect life in exchange. He was and is my substitute' and went on to say, "I always understood it was a representative death, not a substitutional one. Why isn't he still dead? You deserve to be dead forever, so there isn't a lot of correlation between what we deserve and what happened to Christ..."

Thoughts?"

Yes, Justin, I believe I have the answer to your question "Why isn't Jesus still dead?"

It is my belief that Jesus died in place of Adam. After all, Adam was not put to death in the day he transgressed as God had said he should be. So when Jesus took Adam's sentence upon Himself he died on the cross. So why didn't He remain dead? Had Adam died because of his transgression we can be sure he would not have risen, so why did Jesus?

The answer to this is found by following a little of the Greek. Nothing difficult, but most important. There are two Greek words used for life in the New Testament which are 'psuche' and 'zoe'. If you use your concordance and follow how these words are used, for example, in John's gospel record you will find that Jesus laid down His 'psuche' life which He did not take again - this life stayed dead, and He rose in 'zoe' life - spirit life. Remember the life is in the blood and Jesus shed His blood on the cross. He did not receive His blood back again for He said to the disciples after His resurrection, "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:38, 39). No mention of blood.

Let's take just two verses – John 10: 10 and 11, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have zoe (spirit life), and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his psuche (natural life) for the sheep.”

Deb: I gather some theologians and churches are starting to think through the substitution view. The problem comes in what it says about God; that God *requires* some payment or vengeance for sin... and that forgiveness comes by a transaction rather than by grace.

Even the representative view of Jesus' sacrifice is a transaction. That something was beaten or trumped in his innocent death, and without this God could not *offer* forgiveness.

Russell: Deb, I don't see it that way at all. Indeed I find the idea that God demanded or needed Jesus death before He could forgive us to be abhorrent.

God's love is unbounded and so was/is the love of Jesus. This must be, it has to be, our starting point and continue to be foremost in our thinking, for the moment we drift away from this we are likely to wander away from the gospel message. “God so loved the world that He gave...” not that ‘He demanded’; He didn't! The notion is foreign to the scriptures. Yet it has been Roman Catholic teaching for centuries and many other churches have followed the same idea.

Jesus' life was not taken from Him; He gave it freely. “No man taketh it from me but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” In this we see Jesus loved us equally with His Father.

So we have to ask why He loved us so that He found it necessary to lay down His life for us. Certainly I agree with the many thoughts expressed in this thread that Jesus set us the best possible example and we should want to do the best we can by way of saying ‘thank you.’

But this leaves too many unanswered questions. Why didn't Adam die the day he transgressed? Why are we concluded under sin? What did John the Baptist mean when he said “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world? Why the Virgin Birth? In what way are we born again at baptism?

Of course all the faithful since Adam have been under grace. It has ever been God's way. But this alone does not help in answering any of these questions and many more like them.

If anyone would like me to explain my understanding I will, by the grace of God, be pleased to do so but it will take time.

Deb: Q: Do we have to know the answer to those Qs to be saved?

Russell: I don't know. One thing I feel sure of is that if we have the right understanding of these matters we are not so likely to put the blame on God by saying we have sin in our flesh and therefore we cannot avoid making mistakes. And neither will we say that Jesus had to die for Himself because He had sin in His flesh.

These stories are not right. I do not wish to upset others but I do feel strongly they should be discussed in a spirit of love and then if anyone wants to hold their present views, knowing there is another way, it is their own choice.

Eric: Russell. Why are some dead whilst still living?

Mat 8:21,22 And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

Why is God, not the God of the dead?

Mat 22:32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

Mark 12:26,27 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.” Why did Jesus say believers never die?

John 11:25,26 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Russell: Eric, may I start with the last reference first? You quoted John 11:25,26, “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

In an earlier post I showed how there are two Greek words translated “life” and the translators made no distinction regarding which ‘life’ the context referred to. In this verse we have the Greek word “zoe” used for “life” – “I am the resurrection and the zoe(life): he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he zao(live): and whosoever zao(liveth) and believeth in me shall never die.”

I believe a person’s “zoe” is the new life he is born with at baptism (“ye must be born again”); it is spirit life which is hid with God when we die. Jesus said “I am come that they might have zoe(life) and have it more abundantly.” That is, Jesus gives us zoe or spirit life at this present time, which is ours in trust as it were for we can still lose it by losing faith, but the faithful receive it more abundantly at the resurrection when it becomes eternal.

It is not our natural life - Greek “psuche” that becomes eternal. When we die naturally we lose our “psuche” and there is no indication that the faithful receive it back again at the resurrection. 2 Corinthians 15:44, “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”

In Mark 12:27, God “is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err” - we have again the Greek word “zao” for “living”. Jesus said believers never die because this is the life that the faithful will never lose. When Lazarus died Jesus referred to it as sleep – John 11:11-14, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” When Jesus said, God is not the God of the dead, I believe we should understand it in this way – that He is the God of them that are asleep in death.

With regard to Matthew 8:21,22, “But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead”, I think Paul explains this very well in Ephesians 2:1, where he says “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins”. While there is no Greek word for ‘quickened’ in this sentence we can go down to verse 5 and find that ‘quickened’ here is “suzoopoieo” in the Greek which is a derivative of “zoe” - “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

So the dead whom Jesus was referring to are those dead in trespasses and sins; they had no life (zoe) in them, while in Matthew 22:32 the reference here is to the faithful who kept their zoe(life) unto eternal zoe(life).

Eric: Russell, That would appear to be Scriptural. My personal thoughts on Baptism:-

Whilst we all know that baptism is for the forgiveness of sin, and therefore of little use to a new born child who has not even learned what sin is. However I believe that to be baptised into Christ is far more important than just forgiveness of sin. When you submit yourself to pass under the baptismal waters, you cut yourself off from the breath of life. If it was not God’s will that you should live, you would expire at that time.

However on coming forth from the water, you are a new man, born again, no longer the old man but a new man in Christ. My thoughts, but I believe the following scriptures say the same thing. – (Romans 6:3- 11) “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve

sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

(1 Peter 3:21) “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:” (Colossians 2:8-14) “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

Another Thought Russell - “Herald of the Kingdom.” Vol.5. 1849. page 159.

“Death and corruption then, with reproduction, is the fundamental Law of the physical system of the six days... From these premises it will be seen that we dissent from our correspondent’s notion that all creation , by which we understand him to mean , constitutionally impregnated with corruptibility at the fall. We believe that the change was moral not physical” – Dr Thomas.

The claim that when we “put off the old man and put on the new man” by baptism we pass out from the relation to condemnation and alienation and become related to Christ, in whom we are in a state or relation of reconciliation and favour - not alienation and condemnation. Surely this is easily understood, and is in perfect accord with Dr. Thomas’ way of stating it in “The Revealed Mystery,” but which it is claimed does not mean what it says. It does mean just what it says and it is the truth. Here it is again in the doctor’s own words: “In this life, then, there are two states in relation to God and the children of Adam - the one a state of sin and the other a state of favor; the former is occupied by ‘constitutional sinners’ of all ages, from the babe to the old man, of every shade and variety; and by illuminated transgressors, whose sin is not only constitutional but voluntary; and the latter state is composed of persons who were not only constituted sinners and voluntary transgressors, but who, by obedience to the laws of God and to Christ, are constituted righteous. In regard to the righteous, they are delivered from the fear of death, because, having obeyed the Truth, they have passed from death to life; but this is not the case of constituted sinners and intelligent transgressors. These are both under the sentence of death eternal.”

Eric: Can we truly be in Adam and Christ at the same time? We read in the scriptures that all we must do to get out of Adam and become Christ’s is to go through the waters of baptism, thereby symbolically dying and moving out of Adam into Christ.

As we remain the same person physically, that must rule out again the physical change to Adam’s nature. To go back to the Physical change teaching for a moment, we were taught that flesh and blood cannot be faithful, that we (it) has a bias to sin. Was not our Lord flesh and blood? Did He sin?

The answer to the first question is yes. (Phi 2:7) “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:” (Heb 4:15) “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

To the second, no. Who can deny this? Therefore it is possible for flesh and blood to overcome. Read again the works of the flesh, is there anything there that cannot be overcome? (Gal 5:19-21) “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Likewise the list of spiritual fruits, is there anything there which cannot be attained to? (Gal 5:22-23) “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

If we read honestly we can find many righteous people in the scriptures, ones who have overcome for themselves, but without power to redeem their brothers. (Psa 49:7) “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him:” Why? Because they were the seed of Adam. Which again shows that Christ cannot have been, or we are without hope.

Russell: I agree with all you say above, Eric, and perhaps I can add a little to them. You wrote, “We all know that baptism is for the forgiveness of sin.” True, but I would go further and say that the purpose of baptism, first and foremost is to bring us into covenant relationship with God. Then forgiveness of sins follows any time we sincerely seek forgiveness.

We read of the first covenant in Exodus 24, but I will quote only a small part of it here:- “6. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. 8. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.”

This is confirmed in Hebrews 9:19, “For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, 20. Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. 21. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. 22. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.”

Just as Israel was in covenant relationship with God, through this sacrifice, to keep the Law of Moses, so we too are in covenant relationship with God, through Jesus sacrifice, to keep the Law of Christ,- Galatians 6:2, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:4).

With these thoughts in mind I think we can better appreciate what Jesus meant when at the Last Supper He said, - “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:20). Jesus knew it was His Father’s will that He offer Himself in sacrifice in order to bring in this New Covenant in which we can be forgiven and so stand before God in Jesus’ righteousness. Of all the teachings in Scripture, the understanding and acknowledgement of such supreme, unbounded love carries more influence upon the character than any other.

Eric: Russell. Thanks for the interesting addition to my earlier posts. I read that Sin is transgression of the Law, also where no law is there is no transgression, as Christ is said to have fulfilled the Law, and taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross, can we sin ? or does it ‘in Christ there is no sin’ mean we do not/cannot sin ?

I worry a little about how ‘the precious blood’ of Christ, which we are told bought us, can be an unclean thing he got from his mother, a handmaid of God, as say some.

Di: Eric, I have not heard any of those statements before so will be interested to see what others have to say on those questions.

Russell: Eric, I would like again to start with your last point – “I worry a little about how ‘the precious blood’ of Christ, which we are told bought us, can be an unclean thing he got from his mother, a handmaid of God, as say some.”

But, Eric, you shouldn’t worry about such man-devised notions! The Apostle Peter said “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1:18,19).

Jesus was without blemish and without spot and was not unclean in anyway whatsoever.

I haven't heard Christadelphians use the three quotations from Job in recent years as it seems they have at last realised they have been so badly misused in the past. The three quotations are Job 14: 4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one"; Job 15:14, "What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" and Job 25:4, "how can he be clean that is born of a woman?"

These quotations use two Hebrew words '*tabor*' and '*zakah*' for unclean. The one relating to ceremonial uncleanness from which a man was cleansed at eventide after the appropriate washings or which prevented specified animals from being acceptable sacrifices or food, and the other that moral alienation of mind and heart from fleshly as opposed to spiritual attitudes. They do not apply to the literal flesh.

Very sadly 'sin in the flesh' is still taught in parts of Christadelphia, and Romans 8:3 is still misused to support it. Romans 8:3 reads, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh", but this is not what Paul wrote!!! The translators were biased towards changed flesh teaching introduced into the Church by Augustine around 400 A.D. and became known as the Doctrine of Original Sin which has ever since been a required tenet of the Church, including Christadelphia where it is called Sin in the flesh. I have yet to see a modern translation of the Bible (apart from the Emphatic Diaglott) translate "sinful flesh" correctly. In the Septuagint New Testament it reads "of flesh of sin" showing that it was written by Paul in the possessive case and not "sinful" as an adjective. Flesh is never called sinful in the scriptures.

Paul is showing us that we are all concluded under sin, we are sin's possession and we have King Sin reigning over us - until we become Christ's possession. "God sending His Son in the likeness of sin's flesh" tells us that Christ was never sin's flesh; He was never the possession of King Sin - He was God's possession which God gave for us.

Russell: Eric, you wrote - "I read that Sin is transgression of the Law."

True. 1 John 3:4 states "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." And add to this that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). I see this taught consistently throughout the scriptures and applying to all time from Adam and Eve to the end of Christ's millennial reign.

However, in Galatians 3:21-22, we read, "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

Again, you wrote - "Also where no law is there is no transgression."

This is from Romans 4:15 - "Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression." I think we must see Paul's letter to the Romans as one long line of reasoning explaining how salvation works. In this section Paul is explaining how that the promises were made to Abraham before circumcision and before the Mosaic Law. Therefore the promises were not made because people kept the law, that would make faith void, or unnecessary, but the promises were to those who had faith in God as did Abraham. The wrath of the law is condemnation because no one, or very few, kept it - but those in Christ, being in favour with God, are under grace and so are not condemned by the law. Jesus having borne their iniquities (Isaiah 53)

And again you wrote - "As Christ is said to have fulfilled the Law, and taken it out of the way."

In Colossians 2:13,14, we read, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross".

Having taken the law out of the way does not mean we cannot sin; I'm sure we would all confess to sinning and that is why we seek forgiveness through Jesus. In 'nailing the handwriting of ordinances to the cross' I think is a very expressive way of saying the faithful in Christ cannot be condemned by the law.

Let us all thank God and Jesus for their unbounded love.

Eric: Russell. Yes, and it is written - John 5:24 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” And Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” And Romans 8:2 “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

EXHORTATION

David, the Man after God’s own Heart. 1 Samuel Ch.16, vv 1-3 and 6-14.

The Bible calls David “the man after God’s own heart”. And so we do well to consider his life and character for a few moments. In all we read about his early life, we find a close similarity between David’s personality and that of Christ. And as it should be our ambition to follow as much as possible the example our Lord set us I think it will be profitable for us to run quickly through David’s experiences and how he re-acted in various situations.

His predecessor as king was Saul who was rejected by God for disobedience. The first we read about David was how God sent His prophet Samuel to anoint David instead of Saul. And here, in the very first few verses of his life history, we are taught a lesson we do well to remember. We are told how God sent Samuel to David’s house, but Samuel did not know beforehand which of Jesse’s sons he was to anoint, he only knew it was one of them. And when he saw the tallest he thought this was he. But let us see what God said: “Look not on his countenance nor on the height of his stature; because I have refused him, for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” Yes, it is not the tallest or the strongest, or the most handsome looking whom God chooses. God does not need any strong man anyway as he has so often shown. God has infinite strength Himself, and if he wills, he can destroy all life in a moment. It is a faithful heart that God wants.

David’s family must have been as surprised as was Samuel at God’s choice. They did not even think it worth while to call David. This is what they said of him: - “There remaineth yet the youngest, and he keepeth the sheep”. Yes, they thought of him as just the youngest, just a little shepherd, not worth bothering about. According to man’s standards he would have been the last person to be considered for Kingship. But God knows us more than we do ourselves and in His foreknowledge he knows what we are going to do, and how we are going to out.

The next recorded incident is a very remarkable one. On account of Saul’s disobedience, God’s spirit departed from him, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him and he asked for one who could play the harp when this evil spirit was on him. And out of all people, David, the very one who secretly was anointed his successor, was chosen.

At about the same time David’s encounter with the Philistine giant, Goliath, took place. This was in itself a miracle and showed an unbelievable faith in God. Just think of it - an unarmed inexperienced youth taking on a fight with an armour protected giant, experienced in combat. What a tremendous courage and faith! He knew the encounter would be decisive, for had he lost it would not have been merely a personal defeat, or even death, but a defeat for all Israel. And just listen to David’s challenge as Goliath meets him, “Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied... and all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword or spear; for the battle is the Lord’s.” David knew whom he served, and he was conscious of it all the time.

After that David fought so many successful battles with the Philistines that Saul’s jealousy was aroused and an evil spirit came upon him more and more often and now follows a long series of incidents in which Saul tried to kill David and God delivered him every time. David was nevertheless forced to flee from Saul. Sometime God intervened directly to save David. And at other times He just allowed things to happen in such a way that David had the opportunity to escape.

When David fled from home his wife made a dummy and put it in his bed and told Saul’s messengers that he was sick. After that Saul hunted David from pillar to post, and many times, just when by human standards, it seemed David was lost, God intervened. On the first such occasion the Philistines had invaded

the country and forced Saul to abstain from pursuing after David just as he was at the point of capturing him. But after the Philistines were driven back, Saul again pursued after David, and now, twice in close succession the Lord intervened. A deep sleep fell on Saul and his guard, and David got close to Saul and had his chance to kill him. Each time we read of the great character of David; vengeance belongeth unto God. Man has no right to take life, unless God specially commands to kill. Saul was still the Lord's anointed and David dare not kill him. But to show his faithfulness he cut off the corner of his robe, and on the other occasion took Saul's spear and water pot from the side of him. And then after having got away from Saul he shouted across to him, showed how close he had got to him and how he spared his life.

Saul repented for a short while, but soon afterwards the evil spirit came back, and eventually David was forced to flee abroad, even to the Philistines.

We will not go into all the incidents just now; we know that Saul eventually came to his end at the hand of the Philistines in battle and afterwards the kingdom gradually went to David.

But one incident we must mention. After Saul's death an Amalekite came to David, thinking he could get a reward for telling him that he had killed Saul; but far from it; David himself durst not do anything to the Lord's anointed, how much less this Amalekite? David, far from rewarding him, actually killed him. Yes, David intended no evil. In spite of all that his master Saul had done to David, he remained faithful and loyal to him, even after his death. He ever mourned for Saul.

Although Christ lived about a thousand years later, there are so many close resemblances between his character and that of Jesus that he might have been one of His disciples. Let us look at some:-

1) As we have seen already, David never took vengeance on Saul. Once, when God delivered Saul into his hands and one of his servants wanted to kill Saul, he stayed him with the words, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed..." David, like Christ, realized that vengeance belongs to God.

2) He always trusted in God, and always was in contact with God through prayer, in all distress and in every calamity. But also on his many joyful occasions of victory, he never neglected to render thanks to God. He was always conscious of God's presence over him. His life, like that of Samuel and Christ was a life of full, complete dedication to God. In this sense he serves as an example to us. How many of us can say this of our own lives?

3) David was a man of war. But he was God's faithful servant none the less. From his youth, beginning with his encounter with Goliath he was skilled at combat and all the art and cunning of war and strategy. But he never sought self-glorification. He never fought or killed for selfish ends, except in the matter of Uriah but conducted all battles as God's servant, conscious of fighting for the Lord.

God chooses men of war as well as men of peace to fulfil his purpose with the nations of the earth. In God's plan there is a time for war as well as peace. There was a time of peace and prosperity during the reign of his son, Solomon. But in David's day God's purpose was to subdue all hostile nations, all nations around Palestine who were not completely subdued when Joshua entered the land or during time between Joshua and David. One of David's very good traits of character is that he did not enter into a single battle without asking God, which at that time was to be done at the tabernacle through a priest. And when he grew older and more experienced he did not let his greatness or his increased experience go to his head, but still enquired of God as at the first. He truly was a capable warrior to which both his friends and enemies amply testified. In fact, he is among the best warriors and strategists history has produced. And perhaps together with Joshua and a few other prophets of the Old Testament, he is among the few who in one person combined that of a warrior and a man of God. He truly put his abilities as a warrior at God's disposal.

At the present age we are not to fight or to avenge ourselves, but there are times and have been throughout history when God did destroy wicked and sinful nations, and Israel, as the forerunner of the Kingdom of God to come, was His instrument to carry it out. In fact, the sin of Saul, yes, the very reason why God rejected him in favour of David, was he spared Agag the king of Amalek when God had commanded to kill him.

Of course everyone is gifted in a different way; not all are warriors. But David shows us a supreme example how to put one's abilities, whatever they are, at the Lord's service. In this, I am afraid, we all fall short too often, if we are honest with ourselves. And another point is his constant conscientiousness of the Lord's presence, that the Lord preserves those who seek Him.

Do we always ask God before taking some decision, be it trivial or important? And do we always, without delay render thanks to God when things have gone well and our prayers have been answered?

Let us part with these searching thoughts, hoping that when our Master returns we shall be among those found approved.

G.L.Dreifuss.

“In The Day”

(Gen. 2:7)

The Hebrew term *beyom* means literally “in the day,” and in most occurrences the primary sense gives an excellent rendering, such as is lost, or at least weakened, by the adoption of any secondary meaning. Reference to the occurrences will satisfy in this respect, bearing in mind the call for adherence to the primary sense of the words wherever that sense will harmonise with the context. The incident (I Kings 2: 57-46) which seems to indicate otherwise, only shows that King Solomon could not, with all his power, execute the penalty “in the day.” With the Lord God, promise or threatening is fulfilled to the letter. That Adam did not die “in the day” was due to the riches of the Divine grace which, in view of Calvary, respited him, till, shut out from the tree of life, he died a “natural death.” For the penalty was a judicial death “in the day” that he disobeyed. Thus the Lord is the Saviour of all men, specially of those who believe (I Tim. 4:10), for the entire race being then “in Adam” owes this present life to the great reconciliation on Calvary so that each one is responsible for that gift. Eternal life is for believers alone, those “in Christ:” for rejecters there remains but “the second death,” the lake of fire.

The emphatic testimony of Scripture is that

- (1) without shedding of blood there is no remission;
- (2) reconciliation has been effected on the cross; and
- (3) eternal salvation is something beyond reconciliation, although founded on the same rock. See .Rom. 5, etc.

“COMPANION BIBLE” Appendix No. 18.