

Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 251

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Editorial

Dear Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

With the development of the Internet and rapid communications between people worldwide there has come some wonderful opportunities for sharing knowledge and interests.

So far as Bible students are concerned there is now access to an unlimited amount of material providing information on any and every Bible topic, and access to people prepared to share their expertise.

Research into the Bible was restricted for many centuries with the Roman Catholic Church preventing the spread of Bible interpretation into the common languages of peoples of all nations. Church services were largely in Latin and the introduction of their own ‘private’ interpretation was given free reign.

This enabled religious control through fear and bullying. Creeds were introduced regarding the Trinity, making Mary the Mother of God; Heaven, a place beyond the skies; Hell, a place of eternal torment; the doctrine of Original Sin claiming our physical bodies were not as originally created; the Immaculate Conception; Purgatory, Infant Baptism, etc., etc. The Church accumulated vast wealth and lands, practised tyranny and engaged in wars, all in the name of God. How were people able to find the true God?

About five hundred years ago the Reformation started and the courage of a handful of scholars in bringing translations of the Bible to the common people in their own language is well recorded and their courage greatly appreciated.

Even today the work continues, but the biggest problem is perhaps within ourselves. Do we know the truth of the scriptures? Do we want to know the truth of the scriptures? It is well known that most children believe the same as their parents and grow up to attend churches of the same denomination. Or else they forsake their beliefs altogether and seek the pleasures of this life and lose any faith they may have had. But for those who want to know God, the Bible calls for prayer that we may increase in knowledge and understanding and that we should seek wisdom from God. Matthew 7:7, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

But Jesus warned “Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” but on the other hand He said “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:13,14). Again, in another place He said, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14).

But we are encouraged by Jesus and the Apostles to pray continually and diligently that we might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; and we are assured of His goodness, mercy and loving kindness in revealing all we need to know for our salvation.

Let us give “thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” (Colossians 1:12,13).

With love to all, in Christ Jesus, Russell.

Letter to a Sister dated 17th March 1966

HALESOWEN,
England.

My dear Sister,

Thank you for your letter received yesterday, and I am glad that you are interested in finding out the truth about the nature of man and the meaning of the Atonement. The Christadelphian doctrine of sin in the flesh is worse than many of the errors they condemn in other sects and I am glad you have never held it. I am sending you a parcel of booklets which I hope will help you and your friends.

We do not have a pamphlet about the Devil, but the explanation of Hebrews 2:14 is as follows:-

Jesus destroyed the Devil by taking away his legal ownership of the human race. The Devil is not a supernatural being and in fact has no existence except as a scriptural concept, the purpose of which is to make clear to both simple and intelligent people exactly what it is that we need salvation from and how God has made it possible for sinners to be saved.

Any person, or thought, or action which is in opposition to the will of God is sin, and is personified in scripture as the Devil, or Satan. When Jesus said, “Ye are of your father the Devil; He was referring to the beginning when the Devil was first manifested in the disobedience of our first parents in Eden. This was the Sin of the world, - one simple act of disobedience of a Divine command, which represents all the sins of all the people. It caused a breach between man and God which has existed ever since and means that we are all separated or “alienated” from Him.

In scripture sin is personified as the king or master of those who because of sin are estranged from God. Sin brought a legal condemnation (which is just, because we all sin) which condemns us to eternal death, unless we are delivered from under it by faith in Christ.

It was thus, on the principle which Paul states in Romans 6:16, “His servants ye are to whom ye obey” that by disobedience Adam became the property or possession of King Sin or the Devil and deserve Sin's wages, death. He lost his right to life and therefore all who are descended from him likewise belong by Divine decree to the Sin Power and have no natural right to life. As Paul says, we are sold under Sin, we are in bondage to death, under the law of Sin and death. This is how the Devil has the power of death.

When Jesus was in Gethsemane and they heard the soldiers approaching to arrest him, he said, “The Prince of this world cometh and he hath nothing in me.” He was referring to the Devil, manifested here in evil men and to the fact that this hostile power of sin had no rights or claim over him, as it had over his disciples and all other men, because he was the son of God and did not receive his life from the condemned Adamic line. He realised however, that to accomplish our salvation, he had to allow himself to fall into the hands of the enemy and be put to death, in order to pay with his life the debt of life incurred by sin, under which all men but himself were held in bondage. So, with his voluntary submission to an unjust death at the

hands of the rulers of this world, he gave his life to ransom back the life lost by Adam, the reign of sin (over the redeemed ones) was ended, the power of the Devil over the destiny of men was destroyed.

The key to The Atonement is the Virgin Birth. We are saved by God who gave His own son as a substitutionary sacrifice. He gave himself for us. He died for our sins. It is impossible for sinners to save themselves by good works, because they lost their life in Adam and became the property of the Devil whose wages is death. Only faith in Christ can save, because he has paid the price of release on their behalf with his own life. He alone could do this, offer his life and then rise again, because he received his life direct from God, not from Adam via Joseph, and by living a perfectly obedient life he did not forfeit his life to Sin like Adam. So Jesus is the Lamb of God which taketh away the Sin of the world. He was symbolically slain in Eden, in the sacrifices which provided the skins to clothe Adam and Eve, as a type of their personal redemption and forgiveness. It is only as a rebel, in his naked or unpardoned state that Adam is the federal head of the human race alienated from God. Most people think that Adam became mortal and died because of his disobedience and has perished. Actually he was the first man to be saved by the sacrifice of Christ, although it was then only foreshadowed in the types of sacrifice and clothing. It is in his two sons that we see the manifestation of the two sorts of people with whom God is concerned - Cain, "Your father the Devil, a murderer from the beginning", and Abel, who served God and acknowledged His purpose in offering the proper sacrifice in which blood was shed, thus witnessing to his faith that in the fullness of time God would provide a sin-offering. We do the same when we are baptised, dying in symbol the death which Christ died for us literally.

I hope dear Sister that I have succeeded in making the matter clearer to you and if you find any difficulty write to me again. The only one I know in Queensland who believes as we do is A. W. Hold, Toowoomba, but there are quite a number of Christadelphians in Australia who hold our views.

With love in Jesus' Name,
ERNEST BRADY.

COMMENTS RELATING TO THE SERPENT in Genesis chapter 5

The role played by the serpent recorded in the above scripture has always been a subject for speculation, was it literal, or allegorical? There are difficulties with either of these two extremes in harmonising with other relative scriptures. If the literal view is taken we are faced with the unlikely phenomena of "a beast of the field" (verse 1) with apparent equal intelligence in conversation with the woman, but even if this were so, verse 6 intimates that the human pair were together at the time so why did it not address them both? We know that the lower animals have varying degrees of intelligence and some are able to mimic various spoken words but, they are normally dumb and devoid of the reasoning power invested in God's highest creation (man), they are not moral responsible creatures. Paul's reference in 1 Corinthians 11:5 lends no real credence to the literal view of the case because 'subtlety' is not limited to speech, it is a characteristic which can be manifested in actions and ways, which is only possible in the case of dumb creatures. Nevertheless, the presence of a literal serpent cannot be ruled out if any sense is to be made out of Eve's excuse "the serpent beguiled me" etc. Could she not have been deceived by what she saw the serpent do? It is quite common in countries where snakes abound to see them in trees where they have a vantage point in catching their prey.

It is quite likely that our first parents had been tempted by the forbidden tree before that fateful day, because, to the natural mind that which is prohibited appears more attractive and arouses the curiosity more than that which is allowed. I therefore submit as a possible explanation that the serpent was in the tree 'touching it' (verse 5) and the woman, noticing that no harm came to it by so doing, might she not have been emboldened to do likewise? The seeming conversation with the beast was nothing more than the reasonings of her tempted mind - it would be as though the serpent had said 'thou shall not surely die' etc., although its part in the event was entirely passive, it was only doing that which came naturally to its kind, no outside tempter was necessary to cause the first sin. The testimony of the Apostle James was as true then as now

(chap. 1 verse 15-15), 'enticement' comes in various ways - by what we see, hear, feel, etc. We do not take the 'conversation' between the Devil (Satan) and Christ in the wilderness temptation to be literal so why in the case of Eve? It was evidently auto-suggestion in both cases, though some may still favour the idea of a speaking serpent on the grounds that God caused Balaam's ass to speak (Numbers 22) but that was most certainly a miracle for the sole purpose of preventing the madness of the prophet 'who had been hired to curse Israel.' The only record in the Old Testament scripture and confirmed in the New Testament (2 Peter 2:15) of a dumb creature speaking in man's voice. 1 Timothy 2:14 states that "Adam was not deceived (presumably by the serpent) but the woman, being deceived was in the transgression." A possible reason why Eve was deceived could be her failure to take into account that the 'Tree' forbidden on pain of death applied only to them as morally responsible and not other creatures, so it follows that the subsequent curse on the serpent recorded in Genesis 5:14 must be understood in a figurative sense only, as the following verse is predictive and concerns mankind not a literal serpent and its seed, obviously. To sum up then, we may say that because the literal serpent was involved (however unwittingly) in the temptation and fall of man, God made it to be symbolic of sin and death, the 'enemy' destined to be finally destroyed.

Sister S. E. Linggood.

Further observations on

“Proneness to Sin”

In our last Circular Letter, page 14, we published an article on “Proneness to Sin”. This term is used by Christadelphians to mean we are inevitable sinners. While we object to this understanding of the term it seems this is not sufficient for those who compare this proneness to sin with being prone to coughs and colds for example. Such a condition is not our fault as no one can help getting coughs and colds and there is little that can be done about it. Likewise it is said that sinful flesh is not our fault but sinning is inevitable because we are prone to it.

So to avoid this becoming a war of words it is better to go to the root cause of the reason why anyone should want to say we are prone to sin or that we are inevitable sinners.

As I said at the end of the article on “Proneness to Sin” there is nothing wrong with flesh; it is as God created it and this is the point we must emphasise.

In the article published in our last Issue (No. 250) I quoted from various Christadelphian writings which teach such things as –

- (a) “that because of Adam and Eve’s sin, their nature was changed from an original perfection and became defiled and abhorrent to God because of its proneness to sin”, (b) that we have “sinful nature”, (c) “serpent nature”, (d) “a nature that is unclean and tends only to sin”, (e) “that men and women are set down in a constitution or order of things in which sin is inevitable,” (f) that we have “sin-prone nature inherited from Adam” (g) “the very nature condemned in Eden,” (h) “inherited from Adam a “serpent” nature which could be tempted to sin. This nature was the cause of the trouble.”

The above eight quotations are all false teachings and never has any Christadelphian or anyone else for that matter, proven that Adam and Eve’s nature was in any way changed when they transgressed God’s commandment not to eat of the forbidden tree. The nearest to explaining this view is the Roman Catholic doctrine of Original Sin which necessitated inventing the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in order to exclude Jesus from such a state. It takes some awful ‘reasoning’ by Christadelphian leaders to work out that Jesus had to be crucified because of His supposed condemned flesh.

Listen again to what these writers say –

Robert Roberts: “The crucifixion of Christ as a declaration of the righteousness of God and a condemnation of sin in the flesh, exhibited to the world the righteous treatment of sin. It was as

though it was proclaimed to all the world, when the body was nailed to the Cross; This is how condemned human nature should be treated according to the righteousness of God; it is fit only for destruction”.

Does killing His own righteous Son really declare the righteousness of God? Or does it not rather declare unrighteousness? There is not a shred of common sense in R.Roberts reasoning.

Robert Roberts again, “It pleased God to require the ceremonial condemnation of this sin-nature in crucifixion in the person of a righteous possessor of it, as the basis of our forgiveness... The man produced through Mary, by the Spirit of God, combined the two essential qualities for a sacrifice; He was the very nature condemned in Eden, and therefore wrong was not done when He was impaled upon the Cross. “It pleased the Lord to bruise him.”

This statement doesn't bear analysis. The two essential qualities of all the sacrifices offered throughout the Old Testament times were that they should be both physically perfect and legally clean. Any animal sacrifice that did not fulfil these two requirements was an abomination to God; however, Jesus fulfilled both these essentials. Robert Roberts's two 'essential' qualities are condemned nature and a righteous possessor of it! Not at all what the scriptures teach.

Also R.Roberts statement that “wrong was not done when He (Jesus) was impaled upon the cross”! This utterly contradicts Jesus own words in the parable of the husbandmen recorded in Matthew 21:33 to 41. Here it is in full, “Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” Those to whom Jesus told this parable admitted that wrong was done, contradicting Robert Roberts and furthermore we are told that the Lord of the vineyard should come and miserably destroy those wicked men.

Turning now to Peter Watkins who taught: -

“The Son of God came in human form. In character He was perfect, yet He inherited from Adam a “serpent” nature which could be tempted to sin. This nature was the cause of the trouble. It had to be cursed and crucified.”

This reasoning is seen in Clauses 5 and 12 of the BASF. Clause 5 reads, “Adam... was 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” and (Clause 12) tells us that Jesus “was put to death by the Jews and Romans, who were, however, but instruments in the hands of God”.

We are supposed to learn from this that God murdered His own Son because He had defiled flesh!!! And then they say that having defiled flesh was not Jesus fault!

Contrast these teachings with what we are sure is the true Bible teaching, that God so loved the world that He gave...” Yes, God gave Jesus – Isaiah 9:6, “Unto us a son is given”. Jesus was not put to death by His Father using the Jews and Romans as his weapons! And Jesus said “Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends”. He laid down His own life for His friends therefore God is not responsible for killing Him! Jesus offered Himself to His Father to establish the second covenant, the new covenant in His blood, so that all who will might come to God through baptism into the death of Jesus, thereby coming into covenant relationship with the Father and so become His children.

The first covenant was established in the Wilderness through Moses and the Israelites came into covenant relationship with God who gave them the Law of Moses for their instruction.

The second covenant came through Jesus sacrifice – “This is the new covenant in my blood” – and the Sermon on the Mount is the epitome of instruction for faithful disciples.

Back to Eden - did Adam and Eve have ‘serpent nature’ before they transgressed God’s commandment? No, of course not. So why do Christadelphians make it necessary for his descendants to have it? Adam and Eve transgressed without it and so do we.

Let Christadelphians first prove their doctrine of defiled, sinful, condemned, unclean flesh and then we will reconsider our position!

Brother Russell Gregory.

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

These two questions by the spirit in Isaiah the prophet might be answered more truthfully and sincerely by the unbiased seeker of Truth after considering my comments and review of the Statement of the Faith forming the Christadelphian basis of fellowship, September 14th. 1908, and still adopted at the present time, though not very enthusiastically by many in Australia.

The compilers have separated this statement of faith into 30 Articles but I will only deal with those that are erroneous and unsubstantiated by the Scriptures though the scripture references are printed, in my view, to dazzle the eyes of the unwary, and also as a counter-attack against the truths expounded by Edward Turney, a very sincere Christadelphian, contemporary with Robert Roberts. For if the reader took the trouble to look up all the references it would be discovered that they do not all prove correct the theories of the compilers, consequently their statement at the beginning, “Truth to be received” in many instances turns out to be a “Monstrous and Blasphemous Lie.”

They profess as their foundation the Bible consisting of the scriptures of Moses, the Prophets and the Apostles, the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation. We agree with their references, 2 Tim. 3:16 - The Word of God - Sound Doctrine. 1 Corinthians 2:12. The words of God – “Now we have received... the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God.” Likewise Hebrews 1:1; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 14:37, Nehemiah 9:30, John 10:35,36. “If He called them gods unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken. Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, thou blasphemest!?”

We agree with them, the foundation - the Bible. We agree with the scripture references and you will note I have quoted two of them as examples of what I said regarding dazzling the eyes of the unwary.

You will note that Paul’s words referred to in 1 Corinthians 2:13 is listed No. 25 under the heading “Doctrines to be Rejected”. Now take a look at Clause VIII. Here Christ the sanctified one is branded as in the condemned line of Abraham and David and under condemnation. Why the expression “condemned line”? Where these two men, Abraham and David, in more of a unique position of condemnation than shall we say, Cain who was a murderer? If the spotlight is on condemnation then Jesus might just as well have come from the line of Cain, as there is no more merit in the flesh of Abraham and David, than in the flesh of Cain, that is, if we are considering condemned flesh or condemned nature - invented phrases of early Christadelphians, not found in the Scriptures but still used by them quite often today. Why confuse flesh or

human nature with sinful character? The Scribes and Pharisees adopted the attitude of boasting of themselves as being the seed of Abraham after the flesh, but if, as in the case of Christadelphians, they believed Abraham's flesh to be condemned, they would have had sufficient sense and reason not to boast in it. On the contrary their boasting in Abraham was on account of the promises made to him and inheritance in the same, and not in the quality of his flesh. Their greatest mistake was thinking the inheritance was sure of them by reason of natural descent only, and, not by justification through faith.

I cannot reconcile the words of Paul to the Galatians 5:26-29 with such a phrase as "The condemned line of Abraham." I have never heard of the children of God being classed as condemned - they belong to Christ, and if Christ's, are Abraham's seed. Is there any merit in being baptised into Christ - becoming Abraham's seed - heirs to the promises, only to remain in "the condemned line" position? What nonsense! All through this Statement of faith forming the Christadelphian basis of fellowship there is a deliberate and intentional undercurrent inducing the reader to believe that the flesh is full of sin - that Adam's flesh was changed from very good to very bad - that the flesh was condemned, and not Adam's act of disobedience. This is only because the compilers failed to understand Paul's letter to the Romans and also the letter to the Hebrews and preferred to stop their ears and blind their eyes to Edward Turney's logical reasoning from the same. In other words they failed to discriminate between what Paul describes as being "in the flesh" as the carnal or unregenerated, person "in Adam" as a federal head, and the flesh or nature common to all men including those whom Paul addresses thus, "But ye are not in the flesh - but in the spirit." Romans 8:9.

Having established at the outset by only a few comparisons, the unreliability of the compilers I will now proceed to deal with the numbered articles.

I agree entirely with Clause I. Clause II is a statement of fact and truth but not entirely qualified by statements made elsewhere by Christadelphians in calling Jesus a son of Adam which He could not be. He was a brother of Adam but not a son; He was in fact another Adam - "the last Adam." They were both Sons of God, but the first Adam sold himself and all in his loins, into the bondage of Sin. Hence Clause III. We agree that the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth on the earth was necessitated by the position and state into which the human race had been brought by the circumstances connected with the first man. (1 Corinthians 15:21-22; Romans 5:12-19; Genesis 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21.

But the list of scripture references can mislead the reader into believing something that is not true, therefore clarification is necessary. For example, Genesis 5:19, "In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return." The reader is here intended to believe that this was the death or sentence which passed upon Adam for disobedience or sin, but upon examination this is not the case. Adam was already a corruptible being and if he had remained obedient for a thousand years could still have been allowed to die a natural death if God willed it that way. By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin Romans chapter 5. "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Genesis 2:7. In the time it took Adam to eat of the forbidden tree he became a sinner; instantly under the sentence of death - he had forfeited his natural life, and, as Paul states in Romans 5:12 all life in Adam's loins was forfeited; and so in this way death passed upon all men (not in the physical sense but as a legal sentence on the federal principle. A closer study of Romans chapter 5 would show this to any reader who has no preconceived ideas. What a simple statement Paul makes for us to understand - Romans 5:15. "For if through the offence of one many be dead (not corruptible) - "Dead;" present tense, this can only be in a legal Sense. By one offence death reigns by one righteousness - "life reigns;" present tense again. Only one has to pass out of one federal head into another to be in this unique position. As Jesus said, "I am come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly. Here He mentions two stages - 1) receiving back the life which was forfeited in Eden through faith and baptism into His death, and 2) by a faithful and moral allegiance to Him - have life more abundantly through an incorruptible body. Surely anyone should understand that we cannot be in two federal heads at the same time. There are the dead in Adam and the dead in Christ. The dead in Adam do not rise at Christ's return - only those in Christ - and only those in Christ who are alive at His coming will be changed in order to meet Him in the air or exalted place where flesh and blood cannot exist.

There are also the "dead," which Jesus said could bury their dead - this is the class in Adam - the same "dead" to whom He referred when He said "The hour is coming and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." He is not speaking of those who are in the graves, as

He refers to them later as coming forth, some to life eternal and some to shame condemnation and death (the second death).

“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.” Please note present tense (the position of a man in Christ - no longer in Adam).

We have established then, that thorns and thistles - the sweat of thy face - laborious work and finally falling asleep through decay, was as a result or consequence of Adam’s sin but not the actual sentence or penalty incurred, and I will emphasise this later in connection with Clause X.

I must ask you to consider the reference to 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 because it has been taught by Christadelphians from the time of Robert Roberts that Paul’s words v. 21 “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin...” means that Jesus was made sin for us by being born of a woman and so became sinful flesh at birth – but this is absolutely untrue and a discredit on the Apostle Paul’s intelligence as an expounder of the word of reconciliation. Any intelligent person would know that this refers to Isaiah 53 “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” - on Calvary’s tree this was done - in other words, “He who knew no sin during His life of 33½ years, God made to be a sin-offering for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,” otherwise Christadelphians must give a time when Jesus knew no sin previous to his birth of Mary and they deny that Jesus was pre-existent with God, to which we also agree.

Now to Clauses IV and V which are more or less coupled together, Clause IV being scripturally true but, as we shall demonstrate, contradicted by Clause V. Clause IV reads thus, “That the first man was Adam, whom God created out of the dust of the ground as a living soul, or natural body of life “very good” in kind and condition, and placed him under a law through which the continuance of life (natural life) was contingent on obedience. Genesis 2:7; 18:27; Job 4:19; 55:6, 1 Corinthians 15:46-49; Genesis 2:17).

Clause V. “That Adam broke this law and was adjudged unworthy of immortality” – have you noticed the quick switch? It was the continuance of natural life that was contingent on obedience, now it is immortality. How inconsistent! Immortality is not mentioned in Genesis as a condition of obedience. What confidence can anyone have in such blatant contradiction? But there is worse to follow. “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.” How absurd, to think that God who was displeased with Adam’s disobedience should add further to it by infusing into his body a fixed law of defilement capable of reproduction in his posterity.

Are we to liken God to those men whom Jude describes as “Filthy dreamers who defile the flesh”?

How are we to understand the words of the Psalmist 119: “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord; Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart; they also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways,” How is such a thing possible if there is a fixed law of defilement in the flesh?

Perhaps the compilers mean by defilement a process of decay and corruption; if they do, then the word defilement is superfluous because it only refers to moral conduct in relation to God’s Law. Further to this, Adam was already corruptible and needed no change in his nature as stated by Dr Thomas in Elpis Israel, it was necessary only to prevent Adam partaking of the Tree of Life, a right which he had forfeited. But considering that Christadelphians are committed to a belief that sin is a fixed law or principle in the flesh by this compiled statement of their faith, it is not to be wondered at that the list of quotations in Clause V are all taken out of their context in an endeavour to support their erroneous and invented theories.

[THE LIST OF REFERENCES. Genesis 3:15-19, 22-23 (2 Corinthians 1:9); Romans 7:24; 2 Corinthians 5:2-4; Romans 7:18-25; Galatians 5:16-17; Romans 6:12 & 7:21; John 5:6; Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Psalm 51:5; Job 14:4]

All through the history of Christadelphians they have confused the legal with the physical thus they are “ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the Truth” - until they pluck up enough courage to

challenge their blind guides. The Law of sin and death of which Paul speaks is not a physical Law; all physical laws in the flesh were fixed when Adam was created; for example, desire – hunger - pain - happiness - emotion - sight - touch - sleep etc. together with reproduction of the species. “SIN” is transgression of God’s Law - it is abstract - it cannot be reproduced in the physical sense. Persons can be reproduced who are capable of sin, but this is not a reproduction of sin, because they need not sin as in the case of Jesus. Adam sinned while in the “very good in kind and condition state” and this did not alter his physical state one bit, only his legal position - and his relationship to God. Sin did not enter Adam, it entered the world. “By one man sin entered into the world and the death by sin so death passed upon all men” - not as a physical principle, but as a legal sentence hanging over the whole human race who were in Adam’s loins when he sinned. So by the disobedience of one many are dead (legally) so by the obedience of one, many live (legally) but only by dying to the law of sin and death, through belief and baptism into Christ. Romans 5:14-21, also Romans 6:11; Romans 8:1-2.

Before selecting passages from Paul’s epistle to the Romans Christadelphians should learn to discriminate and rightly divide the word of truth. For example, Romans 8:5 – “For they which are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” v.8 “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. V.9 “But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his; and if Christ be in you the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.”

Does Paul mean that the Roman believers were not flesh and blood nature? Of course not. He meant that having been baptised into the death of Christ the old man belonging to sin as a Master had been crucified and they were no longer in the unregenerated state “in the flesh” under the condemnation as bondservants to Sin personified as a Master. The act of baptism is symbolic of death of course but as an act of faith it is acceptable to God as though the person had actually partaken physically of the death which came by Adam’s sin - which was inflicted death by the shedding of the life-blood. This is what Jesus did for us, for all indeed have been concluded under the one sin of Adam so that all could by faith be concluded under the one act of righteousness by Jesus Christ. Romans 5:18-19. Please note verse 19. If as Christadelphians believe, we can be made physical sinners by a sentence which defiled and became a physical law of Adam’s being and transmitted to his posterity, it should follow that in Christ we are made physically righteous and this righteousness should be transmitted to our posterity by the same means.

Perhaps you can now see the foolishness of confusing the legal with the physical. If we follow the reasoning of the Apostle Paul to the Romans 5:19 he shows us that by the one disobedience of Adam many were constituted sinners in him on the federal principle and were not actual sinners themselves, and also by the obedience of one Jesus, many are constituted righteous, not by works of law but through faith in His shed blood - the blood of the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world (singular not plural) Adam’s sin. See Romans 5:10-11.

Clause VI. It is difficult to follow the minds of the compilers here. They state “That God in his kindness conceived a plan of restoration which, without setting aside His just and necessary law of sin and death, should ultimately rescue the race from destruction, and people the earth with sinless immortals.” (Revelation 21:4; John 5:16; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 John 2:25; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1; 2; Romans 5:26; John 1:29).”

It appears from this that the law of sin and death was not set aside for Adam or anyone else, so what did sacrifice profit Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Lot and thousands more? They were all subjects of the law of sin and death according to this statement. How can the race be ultimately rescued from destruction? Rescue means to save, but if a person has died and is buried, that person cannot be rescued from a destruction that he has already experienced. This theory is absolutely out of harmony with Paul’s words to Romans chapter 6 on the effect, belief and baptism into Christ’s death. If you read the first eleven verses you will find that we are rescued from destruction, not ultimately, but now we are asked, as people in Christ, to reckon ourselves to be alive unto God. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were also in this position. “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

Regarding people of the earth with sinless immortals - the compilers should have been more careful in their words. Christadelphians believe that the just and unjust will be raised in the same nature in which they

died, for judgement. They believe that the just will have flesh and bone nature and they will be re-endowed with the character they possessed as rational and sensible persons before they died. This means in fact that they will still believe that there is sin in the flesh - how then can they be styled as sinless immortals? What difference is there in flesh energised by spirit and flesh energised by blood? The difference is in the limitation of supply. The blood is the conveyor of life obtained through food and oxygen and is limited to the earth. The spirit is unlimited and does not deteriorate with time, for God the Source, is Eternal. How then has sin been eradicated from the flesh? It must still have been in the flesh of Christ when he rose from the dead if we are to believe Christadelphians; otherwise He left it behind in His shed blood which is supposed to cleanse us from sin. Draw your own conclusions.

We of the Nazarene Fellowship believe that the first resurrection involves only the just and that they rise incorruptible, as stated by Paul; the resurrection of the unjust being a thousand years later. I will deal with this under clauses 24 and 25.

There is not much to comment on in Clause VII apart from the fact that I do not know what promises were made to Adam, although I do not deny that promises were made to him. In fact, we believe that Adam was redeemed by the typical slain Lamb, that he identified himself with the death of the animal and was therefore granted a new lease of life to serve his Creator until natural death claimed him, and there is no evidence to say that he will not rise from the dead. But the B.A.S.F. opposes this view by saying that Adam received the wages of sin when he died a natural death. Wages are for services rendered therefore in their view Adam served Sin as a Master, until he died. Does God forgive or redeem and then exact the full penalty? Think on these things.

Brother P. Parry.

To be continued...

“And That Rock was Christ”

When Paul made this statement he was speaking of the things which stood in a representative aspect to Christ and the new covenant. His statement that “That Rock was Christ” was just equal to the statement of the Lord Jesus at the eating of the Passover with His disciples, when He took the bread, saying, “This is my body,” – i.e., in a certain way it represented His body. The rock was a very striking representation of Christ. Jehovah said, “I will stand before thee thereupon the rock of Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.” Jehovah stood, or rested, upon the rock. Of Christ it was said in prophecy, “the spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him;” and again, “the spirit of the Lord God is upon me;” and John the Baptist testified that “God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him;” also, Paul’s statement is “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.”

In striking the rock, Moses had with him the elders of Israel; and so he stood for the whole nation. Christ, upon whom the spirit rested, was smitten by the nation. The prophet foretold, “they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.” That smiting was unto death, when He lay down His life for His people; and through, or on account of it, the stream of life-giving water has flowed out to thirsty souls. Just as Israel drank of that spiritual rock that went with them, so have all saints been made to “drink into one spirit.” The water which flowed out of the rock in the wilderness was representative of things spiritual; the living water is spirit and life, as Jesus said of the words He spoke, “It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the word that I speak unto you are spirit, and are life. It was God who, at divers times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers” – that was speaking by His Son; and so Jesus said, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life”

Brother Cilas Smith
Extract from “The AEON”, page 334, July 1885

About Substitution

Recent correspondence with Brother Allon Maxwell:-

Hi Russell, I thought you might be interested in this short article which was prompted by a comment from a correspondent about John Launchbury's book - "Change Us Not God" - which was mentioned in a couple of recent issues of the Circular Letter. Feel free to use it at your discretion.

My correspondent said:

"I can see even from cursory examination, that he raises challenging argument against substitutionary views of the Atonement. Something that I must confess, has been rolling around in the back of my mind, ever since I read John Launchbury's book, 'Change Us, not God'."

Allon's Answer:

Yes, I have a copy of John Launchbury's book. I think it is quite good for a Christadelphian source in that it does not promote the doctrine that Jesus died to cleanse himself of "sin in the flesh". However like all of the many Christadelphian works on the subject which I have read, he fails to deal adequately with the Biblical concepts of RANSOM and REDEMPTION. They are mentioned only in the briefest possible terms, without addressing properly what they DO mean in relation to our salvation.

About SUBSTITUTION he (John Launchbury) says:

"The development of the substitution doctrine is well established historically. The first atonement theory of the Catholic Church came from Origen in the third century. He believed that the devil had gained formal ownership over us, and that God had to pay a ransom to the devil to buy our release. Jesus was that ransom, but once the devil released his claim on us, God then raised Jesus from the dead to get him back, too.

In the eleventh century, Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury completely recast the theory of atonement. He replaced the Ransom Theory with a Satisfaction Theory, in which God has been dishonoured, so His righteousness has to be satisfied. The death of Jesus was his method for satisfying His honor. The satisfaction theory quickly became the standard understanding of the Catholic Church, but it itself was replaced by Luther and Calvin et al in the Protestant movement by the substitution theory. Penal Substitution, as it is properly called, replaces the honour aspect of satisfaction with the legal theory we have explored above."

Of course it is easy to reject these obviously UN-Biblical theories. However from that promising beginning, Launchbury completely fails to address the Scriptures which DO speak positively of a REAL "Ransom theory", and from thence to a SUBSTITUTIONARY aspect to the Atonement!

The most commonly encountered argument against substitution, from Christadelphians, says that it can't be right because it isn't "just" by their human standards. Many of them introduce that tired old Mainstream Church "STRAW MAN", that says an angry God vented his wrath against us on Jesus, in order to change his attitude towards US. And from that they too quickly conclude that ALL substitution MUST be completely wrong!!

Of course THAT Mainstream Church theory can't be true. Indeed in my opinion, it borders on blasphemy! God wasn't beating up on Jesus to satisfy his anger before he could change his attitude towards us. The Atonement arises from God's LOVE for his creation - NOT his WRATH against sin.

The important issue is that the Bible does in fact teach a different form of SUBSTITUTION which doesn't accuse God of injustice, and doesn't accuse Him of assuaging his wrath against us by beating up on an

innocent man, and instead does correctly emphasize the LOVE which led God to GIVE his son that we might have everlasting life! (John 3:16)

So, what do the Scriptures say about this subject?

RANSOM AND REDEMPTION

“Ransom” is a price paid for release of a captive. “Redemption” is the buying back of something sold or encumbered.

And the Bible does use both of those concepts to describe what Jesus did on the Cross. His BLOOD (life) was the price paid to RANSOM us from “captivity” to sin AND its penalty. His BLOOD (life) was the price paid to buy us back (redeem us) from the captivity into which we had sold ourselves.

SUBSTITUTION

BOTH of those terms introduce the concept of some sort of SUBSTITUTION.

Jesus paid the RANSOM with his blood (life) when he was UNJUSTLY put to death on the Cross as a criminal, to save us from the criminal’s death we did JUSTLY deserve.

REDEMPTION uses a different word to describe the same thing. His blood (life) was the price paid to redeem us from the slavery to sin, into which we had sold ourselves.

HE died and WE live! If HE hadn't died WE would still face death at the judgment. Because HE died WE will rise from the dead. And because HE died WE will live for ever. Because He has done that our sins will NEVER be mentioned to us again.

Of course we must not ignore the fact that this salvation is NOT offered without obligation on our part. The Scriptures do NOT support the common Mainstream Church concepts of unconditional “*salvation by grace alone*”, or “*once saved always saved*”.

The offer of the salvation PURCHASED by the SUBSTITUTIONARY sacrificial death of Jesus comes with a NON NEGOTIABLE CONDITION that we first commit ourselves to a real and ongoing repentance before forgiveness can be granted.

The Scriptures say plainly that there was no other way for us to be forgiven without the shedding of Jesus' blood. He died (for our sins) and because of that, we don't die (for our sins). Instead we live!!

I think the REAL issue is that if GOD says the death of Jesus is somehow a FORM of substitution, (and he does) we have to come to grips with it, rather than try to find reasons to reject it because we don't like some of the “standard” non Biblical explanations. If indeed we must have any explanation of HOW and WHY Substitution works, there is no need to get complicated the way so many do. For me it works OK for at the simplest level.

- | | |
|---|---|
| Q). Who died on the cross for my sins? | A). Jesus. |
| Q). Who should have died in the cross for my sins? | A). ME!!! |
| Q). What is the result of Jesus dying on the Cross? | A). I have found a love for God and his Son which led me to repentance and obedience, and I have been forgiven, and I will NEVER have to die for my sins. |

Inevitably that brief explanation does imply some form of substitution.

Of course our English Bible does not use the word. But the meaning behind those Old Testament sacrifices for sin certainly does imply “substitution”. The beast dies, and the repentant sinner lives instead of dying!

Isaiah 53:11 says it without using the precise word. (in Hebrew “*bear iniquity*” is idiom for “*bear the penalty of iniquity*”. The NEB has it in plain words - “*himself bearing the penalty of their guilt*”)

And although the word itself is not found in the New Testament English texts, the Greek New Testament text actually does use the word!! In a couple of places, when speaking of the Atonement, it uses the Greek word “anti” (“instead of” or “in place of”), e.g. Matt 20:28, Mark 10:45, where Jesus said of Himself, “even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for (anti) many.”

1 Pet 3:18 uses a different word (*huper*) with similar meaning, Jesus gave himself “*the just for the unjust*”. (1 Pet 3:18 - see it in Weymouth's translation). Timothy also uses this word when he speaks of “ransom” in 1 Tim 2:6.

Of course SUBSTITUTION isn't the ONLY concept used by the Bible in connection with the death of Jesus. It is only one of several.

But that doesn't mean we are permitted to emphasize those others at the expense of substitution. Nor may we simply dismiss it or ignore it. Indeed for me personally (without ignoring the others) it is THE one which most inspires my love for Jesus!

Romans 5:6-9 - “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”

FINALLY

If you have a different theory of “how the Atonement works”, I will not reject you on account of it! I have learned that love must concede that, even if your own understanding of how it “worked” in your case is different to mine, **you may also have arrived where I am**. If you are truly reconciled with God, that will be obvious from the visible “*fruit of the spirit*” growing in you, (Gal 5:22-25). If I can see that, I dare not fail to confess you before men as my brother in Christ, (Matt 10:32-33) just because we differ in our understanding of the detail of how it came to pass for each of us.

Have we “arrived”? How do we measure that?

“By **THIS** shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have **LOVE** one to another”. (John 3:35).

Hope some of this is useful. Brother Allon Maxwell.

For additional comment refer to my article “What Jesus said about the Atonement”? Copy attached.

After receiving the above I wrote to Brother Allon as follows:-

Thank you for your email. I have read through your two pieces and like them very much. Thank you too for allowing me to publish. I shall include your answer regarding Substitution in the next C.L. The other I shall keep for another time.

Just one small query... You wrote, “Of course substitution isn't the only concept used by the Bible in connection with the death of Jesus. It is only one of several.”

My question – which, if any, of these other concepts do you see exclude substitution?

Reply from Brother Allon:-

Hi Russell, I certainly don't think that any of the other biblical concepts of the Atonement exclude substitution. Rather, they present it using different metaphors, each of which emphasizes the love of God and Jesus for us from a slightly different perspective.

Individual differences in personality seem to result in each of us possibly emphasizing one more than others because it makes more impact on our individual minds when presented that way.

But the bottom line must always be that Jesus shed his blood FOR US, to SAVE US FROM OUR SINS, (1 Cor. 15:3) and that there was NO OTHER WAY possible for God to save us (Matt 26: 39-42) and that should inspire LOVE and REPENTANCE and OBEDIENCE. (John 14:15; 15:10)

If it doesn't do that for us, then no matter how technically "correct" we may have the "theory" of how it "works", we are still lost!!

Some of these "other concepts" are mentioned in the article I attached to my email.

QUOTE

That said though, Jesus did talk about his death in relation to our salvation. When He did it was in the simplest of terms, and all contained in a few verses. He spoke about:

- 1. Love in Action – A man laying down His life to save His friends. (John 15:13)*
- 2. A Good Shepherd defending his flock from the wolf. (John 10:1-16)*
- 3. A grain of corn dying to produce a harvest of many grains. (John 12:24)*
- 4. A brass serpent "lifted up" for sinners to see, and be saved from a "bite". (John 3:14)*
- 5. The Bread of Life – Manna from heaven – Eating His flesh and drinking His blood. (John 6:53-58)*
- 6. Drinking from a Cup. (Matt 26:39-42)*
- 7. His blood shed for remission of our sins. (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20)*
- 8. His blood shed to seal a covenant. (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20)*
- 9. A sacrificial "ransom" paid by Jesus for our release from the penalty of our sin. (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45)*

And that's it! Just a few short word pictures designed to help us understand that he sacrificed His life to save ours – BECAUSE HE LOVED US.

Hope this clarifies it for you, In Christ, Allon

Where Dr Thomas Went Wrong

Where Dr. Thomas went wrong was in making the statement that the natural corruptibility which we share with all other forms of life is the penalty of sin. He said:

"the nature of the lower animals is as full of this physical evil principle as the nature of man, though it cannot be styled 'sin' with the same expressiveness because it does not possess them as a result of their own transgression."

Why it never occurred to him that the fact that the lower animals have a corruptible nature which is not the result of sin is the best of reasons for thinking that neither is man's natural corruptibility the result of sin. This is what is really wrong with Christadelphianism - the theory that nature, both of man and animal alike, is sinful flesh - there is nothing the matter with the view that man is by nature an animal. It is his brain and its capacity for abstract thought which makes him different.

Brother Ernest Brady

More on Hebrews 9:12

Following the publication of our last Circular Letter I received a note from Brother Tony Cox in which he says “I’ve done some work on the use of Koine Greek verbs, in the ‘middle voice’. I believe that a Koine Greek verb in the middle voice does not necessarily mean that ‘the subject is always doing something for His/Her own benefit’. It’s apparently not so - and the whole issue is a lot more complicated than that!”

Regarding this matter we here publish correspondence between Brother Tony Cox and Dr Bechtle. And to introduce this correspondence Brother Tony writes:-

“Dear Bible students, Christadelphians often seem to use Hebrews 9:12 as a so called ‘proof-text’, for their unusual view that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, personally, allegedly needed redemption from so called ‘physical sin’ or ‘sinful human nature.’

As can be seen from the reply below, from Dr Bechtle (a former Professor, teaching Greek, at Arizona Bible College, USA), Christadelphians seem to be once again, guilty of overstating their supposed case!

Wishing you all God's blessings, Tony.

Brother Tony’s first letter to Dr Bechtle regarding Hebrews 9:12 and the ‘middle voice’ implications:

Dear Dr. John Bechtle, Best wishes to you, from England.

Dr. John Bechtle, could you please help me out, with the implications of the use of the middle voice, regarding the verb ‘obtained’, found at Hebrews 9:12?

The Christadelphians make great claims about the use of the middle voice here, and they seem to openly state, that it unambiguously refers to the supposed fact that our Lord Jesus Christ obtained redemption FOR HIMSELF, PERSONALLY (from His supposed [according to Christadelphians] possession of “sinful flesh” [Rom. 8:3, supposedly], which was necessarily mortal, necessarily destined to die, and supposedly, naturally inclined towards transgression); and ONLY afterwards could Jesus be said to have redeemed us.

Christadelphians believe that Jesus had no literal pre-existence, and despite being born of the Virgin Mary, by the Spirit of God, He was nevertheless (supposedly) a member of Adamic humanity, that inherited the full effects of Adam’s transgression [Romans 5:12 & 19]; and therefore, He Himself, was personally in need of redemption, from His body [Romans 8:23] - which He supposedly achieved, by His own Sacrifice. Christadelphians [erroneously, in my opinion] claim that Jesus had to die for Himself first, before He could be considered as being a sacrifice for us!

What I want to know Dr. Bechtle is, are the Christadelphians wrong in their claims about Hebrews 9:12? Any help here, would be very gratefully appreciated!

Wishing you and yours God's blessings, Yours in hope, Tony Cox.

Tony received the following reply from John Bechtle:-

Dear Brother, Thanks for your question and your interest in finding solid answers to the challenges raised by this group. Christadelphians are not a common part of the theological landscape in my circles, but your description of their doctrines certainly sounds like a heretical group.

The short answer is that they are grossly overstating their case on the basis of the middle voice. They are correct in saying that “obtained” in Hebrews 9:12 is in the middle voice, but it certainly doesn’t prove

their doctrine. The middle voice can be used to communicate a wide range of ideas, and some of those other ideas make much better sense than their interpretation.

I have listed a few of the most common shades of meaning that the middle voice can communicate on my web site, ezraproject.com/2011.03.01_arch.html. And the major grammar books go into much more detail. Here's how Dana and Mantey (an old classic) describe the middle:

“We can never hope to express exactly the Greek middle voice by an English translation. . . While the active voice emphasizes the action [itself], the middle stresses the agent [the one doing it]. It, in some way, relates the action more intimately to the subject. Just how the action is thus related is not indicated by the middle voice, but must be detected from the context or the character of the verbal idea.” (H. E. Dana & Julius Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. Macmillan, 1957, p. 157.

In other words, the middle voice puts extra emphasis on the subject, but you can only tell *how* it's emphasizing it by looking at the context and paying attention to the meaning of the verb.

The Christadelphians are assuming that this is what grammarians sometimes call an “indirect middle,” where the subject acts for himself, or in his own interest. That's a legitimate usage, and it's reasonably common. But I think it's what some grammar books call an “intensive middle.” In this common usage, the middle voice is just emphasizing the subject. In English, we might say, “He himself did it.” Or you might underline the subject for emphasis. If you were speaking, you would emphasize the subject. The idea is “He did, not anyone else.” And in Hebrews 9:12, the context clearly supports the idea that it was Christ, not anyone else, who obtained our redemption.

Another example of this usage is in Acts 20:24, where Paul says, “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself.” “Consider” is in the middle voice, indicating that however others may regard the situation, this is what *he* thinks about it. As Dana and Mantey point out, “The Greeks employed the middle where we must resort to italics” (p. 159).

Here's a principle that I try to communicate to my students: There are some things in Greek that you can know for sure, because the spelling of the word tells you. But when you go beyond those certainties, you are doing some interpreting. That's OK, as long as you know there is room for disagreement. You should know what's possible, based on Greek grammar, then use context and common sense to discern which usage is employed in the verse you're studying. In this case, you can know for sure that the verb is middle, because that's how it's spelled. But you must observe the context and use common sense to discern which of the possible grammatical usages was chosen by the writer.

In the case of the Christadelphians, it seems clear that they came to this passage with their minds already made up. They constructed their theology elsewhere, and brought it to this verse. As a result, they chose one of the less likely alternatives because it seemed congruent with their doctrine.

I hope this is of some help. I could have just said they were wrong, but I thought it would be useful to give you a more comprehensive picture of how this all works. Feel free to contact me if you want to clarify any of the points I made.

May the Lord bless you in every way! John Bechtle

PS Would you mind if I used your question one of these days as the basis for an entry in my blog?

2nd letter from Tony Cox to Dr John Bechtle

Subject: Hebrews 13:20 and the Christadelphians

Dear Dr. John Bechtle,

Many thanks for your informative comments regarding the use of the middle voice for the verb “obtained”, at Hebrews 9:12, and the attempt by Christadelphians to demonstrate by this verse, their erroneous view that Jesus Himself, needed redemption from alleged “sinful flesh” (cf. King James version; Romans 8:3). They believe, I think like Augustine in the 5th century CE., that 'sin' is a synonym of human nature; and that 2 Cor. 5:21 [He... was made 'sin' for us] refers (erroneously in my opinion!) to Christ, becoming a human being, and in need of personal redemption Himself, from 'sinful flesh'.

Your comments on the use of the middle voice, were just the kind of material I was looking for; and 'yes', please use my question for any of your future blogs.

With respect to the middle voice, could you please confirm that the verb “purify” at Titus 2:14 [...to purify for Him a people for His own possession...] is also in the middle voice?; as is the verb 'rescues', at Col. 1:13?

With respect to Heb. 13:20-21; Harry Whittaker [who was arguably, Britain's foremost Christadelphian scholar] states in his book “Bible Studies - An Anthology;” p. 261-262, “This [Heb. 13:20-21] teaches clearly that the sacrifice of Christ, 'the blood of the everlasting covenant', was effective to bring not only the redeemed, but also Jesus Himself from the grave. The implications concerning the nature of Christ are very clear. Efforts are sometimes made to evade these conclusions by adopting a different punctuation, as though: 'make you perfect to do His will' depends on association with 'the blood of the everlasting covenant' as means of such sanctification. BUT THE ORDER OF THE WORDS IN THE GREEK WILL NOT ALLOW THIS.” [EMPHASIS ADDED].

Some time ago, I did my own analysis of Bible versions concerning these verses, which I hope to attach to this e-mail. * (We hope to include this in our next Circular Letter - editor). I was hoping to make the point that essentially, the verses are genuinely, and intrinsically, ambiguous.

Could you possibly give my essay a quick 'run through', and give me any possible comments - I want to know, if, and where, I'm wrong!

Am I essentially right, or does Harry have a point?

Any comments Dr. Bechtle, will once again, be very welcome.

Wishing you, and yours, God's blessings, Yours cordially, Tony Cox

Second reply from Dr Bechtle:-

Thanks for the comments.

In Titus 2:14, “purify” (*katharise*) is not middle. It is an aorist active subjunctive. On the other hand, “redeem” (*lutrosetai*) in the same verse is an aorist middle subjunctive. In the context of that verse, however, it cannot mean that Jesus redeems Himself. The word “us” is the direct object, so Jesus is redeeming us, not Himself.

In Colossians 1:13, “rescued” (*errusato*) is an aorist indicative middle. Again, the direct object is “us.” Jesus rescues us, not himself.

Regarding your essay on Hebrews 13, I think you're on the right track. There are two areas of ambiguity in the verse: the punctuation and the meaning of ‘en’. As you're well aware, the discussion here can be pretty complicated as you try to work through the options, making this a very weak foundation for such an important doctrine.

Punctuation -- There was little or no punctuation in the earliest manuscripts, so it's risky to rest too heavily on arguments from punctuation.

Meaning of 'en' -- Here's a summary of the basic uses of the preposition, taken from Daniel Wallace, "*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*," p. 372:

'en' is the workhorse of prepositions in the New Testament, occurring more frequently and in more varied situations than any other. It overlaps with the simple dative uses to a great extent, but not entirely. The following categories are for the most part painted with broad strokes.

1. Spatial/Sphere: 'in' (and various other translations)
2. Temporal: 'in', 'within', 'when', 'while', 'during'
3. Association (often close personal relationship): 'with'
4. Cause: 'because of'
5. Instrumental: 'by', 'with'
6. Reference/Respect: 'with respect to'/'with reference to'
7. Manner: 'with'
8. Thing Possessed: 'with' (in the sense of 'which possesses')
9. Standard (=Dative of Rule): 'according to the standard of'
10. As an equivalent for 'eis' (with verbs of motion)

I haven't studied Hebrews 13 carefully enough to go much further on the spur of the moment, but I do think your approach makes sense.

One minor correction: In your paragraph on Hebrews 9:12, you say that the Greek words "exagorazo" and "lutroo" mean both "redemption" and "deliverance." Those words are verbs, so it would be more accurate to say that they mean "redeem" and "deliver."

May the Lord bless you! John Bechtle

Editor's comment: We very much appreciate the efforts of Tony Cox in pursuing this subject and for contacting Dr Bechtle for his analysis of the Greek. It is indeed encouraging to receive more authoritative and accurate understanding of the Greek middle voice' than we have received from other sources.

The Nazarene Fellowship has for many years opposed the Christadelphian misconceptions regarding their views on the Atonement and we again sincerely ask them to reconsider their teachings in view of the facts with which we have presented them. The Christadelphian position is untenable and no amount of repetition will improve matters.

Once again the starting point of Christadelphian doctrine is the supposed change in the flesh of Adam and Eve. There was no physical change in their flesh but a legal change in their relationship with God. The Apostle Paul explains this change as being "concluded under sin" – it is a legal position which God has chosen to place people in for the purpose of blessing the faithful. Only in supposing there was a change in our flesh can the Christadelphian position be upheld. In their Statement of Faith, Clause 5 we read of "a sentence which defiled and became a physical law of his being, and was transmitted to all his posterity," while in Clause 12 we see how Jesus is included – "He was put to death by the Jews and Romans, who were, however, but instruments in the hands of God, for the... the condemnation of sin in the flesh..." While the wording of this was modified in the Cooper/ Carter Addendum, there was no substantial change in meaning.

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Russell.

EXTRACT FROM ARCHBISHOP WHATELEY'S

“ESSAYS ON SOME OF THE DANGERS TO CHRISTIAN FAITH”

A still more important instance perhaps is the one I slightly adverted to in my last Charge, that of the 7th and 8th chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. Hardly any one, I think, reading the whole passage continuously without any regard to the arbitrary break at the close of the 7th chapter, would be in danger of supposing that the Apostle Paul, though speaking in the first person, is describing his own actual character, in his regenerate, sanctified state, when he describes a man “sold under sin,” – “brought into subjection to the law of sin,” – “doing the evil that he would not” – “not doing the good that he would” – and living a life of wretched contradiction to his own judgment. The contrast is so marked between, this description and that which immediately follows, of “those that are in Christ Jesus” (including, no one can doubt, the apostle himself), “who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit,” who “being spiritually-minded have life and peace,” “and through the spirit do mortify the deeds of flesh,” - the contrast, I say, is so marked between these two descriptions, that there would be little danger of any one's supposing they could be meant to apply to one and the same person at the same. But the mistake, which is not infrequently made, is the result, I conceive, of the reader being accustomed to stop at the end of the 7th chapter, and then a day after, or perhaps a week, or a month after, to begin the perusal of the 8th chapter, as if it were a distinct treatise.

The writings of the Apostle Paul, do certainly contain many difficulties; but the easiest book in the world might be made unintelligible by being studied in that manner.

In the instance now before us, you may easily, I think, point out to the learner; that in the 5th and 6th verses of the 7th chapter, the Apostle is contrasting the conditions of “those who are in the flesh,” and “bring forth fruit unto death,” and those who are in Christ, who “bring forth fruit unto God;” and that he proceeds to expand and develop that contrast more fully, in what follows; describing first the person who is “under the law,” with a knowledge and approbation of what is good, and an habitual practice of what is evil; and then (from the beginning of chapter 8) the person who is “in Christ Jesus,” and “walks not after the flesh, but after the spirit.!

And that the Apostle really is describing two different, and indeed opposite characters (which those only I think will doubt, who have been early accustomed to peruse chapters as so many distinct treatises) you may easily evince to those of your hearers who are attentive and reflecting, by joining together portions of each description, and pointing out the monstrous and absurd incongruity that would result, as a proof they cannot be both applicable to the same person at the same time; as for instance –

“There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit, but who do the evil they would not, and do not the good that they would – for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death; O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? . . . That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit; for to will is present with me, but how to perform, that which is good, I find not ... So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God; but, we are not in the flesh, but in the spirit; but I am carnal, sold under sin.”

I have insisted the more earnestly on the right interpretation of this passage, because the opposite interpretation goes to nullify, practically, all our labours in the inculcation of moral duty. For, when any description or example is set before men, by way of pattern, we may be quite sure that this will be made the standard, and that general principles and precepts will be practically explained, and limited, and modified, in their application, according to that standard. We can never hope that our hearers, though living in sin, and only occasionally bewailing it, will really feel much shame and uneasiness, while they believe themselves to be on a level with the Apostle Paul.

The interpretation I have been censuring I have heard defended as a mode of inculcating the important lesson; if the necessity even in the most advanced Christian, of continual vigilance against the infirmities and evil tendencies of our nature, and the temptations to which he is still exposed, and which he can resist only by divine help. The lesson is true and important, and inculcated, though not in this, in several other

parts of the sacred writing, as for instance, 1 Corinthians 9:24. But we must never presume to distort the sense of any passage of Scripture for the sake of inculcating even a Scriptural truth, which was not in the intention of the writer. In the present instance, however, the Apostle's words do not, and cannot inculcate such a lesson, for he is describing, not a man vigilantly watching against the frailty of his nature, and earnestly struggling against, and by divine aid, subduing it; but, on the contrary, one who is actually "carnal, sold under sin" - brought into captivity to the law of sin" - and not merely tempted to do, but habitually doing "the evil that he would not." And if this be understood as the Apostle's description of himself in his Christian state, this, so far from inculcating the lesson of vigilant self-distrust and resistance to evil, would put an end to every effort of the kind as hopeless, useless, and even presumptuous.

Why The Cross was Necessary for Salvation

What is Salvation

It is well known fact that all animals, human or otherwise, must inevitably die (one exception recorded in the scriptures is that of Enoch, who was translated "that he should not see death". But this exception goes to prove that God can alter this rule at His will. There will be in the future others who will not die but who "shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump." (1 Corinthians 15:52) at the return of Jesus.

We are told in John 5:6 that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Also we read "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live;" (John 11:25) "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). See also Luke 9:56 etc.

Thus we see that salvation is a saving from (or out of) death. Believers from the beginning of the creation, who have died, are not reckoned as having perished, for they are all written in God's Book of Life (Philippians 4:5; Revelation 5:5, etc.) and they will take part in a resurrection at the appointed day (compare the statement of Jesus "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" to prove to the Sadducees the certainty of the resurrection.)

Why does man die?

Paul tells us clearly (Romans 5:12) "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." This one man was, of course, Adam (verse 14) who, by eating of the forbidden fruit, transgressed God's law, and as a consequence was expelled from the Garden of Eden, "lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever" (Genesis 5:22). To this day the tree of life is withheld from us and we die. Our own individual sins do not constitute the cause of our dying (for otherwise there would be no infant deaths) nor can our own righteousness bring about everlasting life, "For there is none other name (but Jesus) under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

The qualifications of a Saviour

a) The Saviour must be a man.

Since it is mankind which is guilty of sin, it would not be right, even according to man's view of justice, to inflict the penalty on some other animal or creature. Scripture takes the same view, for in it we read (Hebrews 10:4) "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." But how can we know that human blood (under certain circumstances) may accomplish this? Well, it is laid down in God's plan of salvation which began to operate in the very earliest days, and we may understand some of it

by studying His word. If we turn for a moment to the first pair who sinned we can see some of the principles involved.

After their transgression, Adam and Eve immediately became conscious of a feeling of nakedness which they sought to overcome by wearing aprons of fig leaves. As a mere bodily covering no doubt these served their purpose, but evidently they were not approved by God who made coats of skins and clothed them, their consciousness of nakedness and of guilt thereby becoming dulled or non-existent. (We may here remember the words of David “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Psalm 52:1) But in order to cover them with skins it had been necessary to cause the death of some animal, or animals and here we see a principle of salvation coming to light. The penalty of Adam's transgression was death in the day that he ate of the fruit. Adam did not die that day, but some animal did. Now we read in Revelation 12:8 about the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; an obvious reference to Jesus (see Revelation 5), and so we see that the animal slain in the Garden of Eden was but a representative of Jesus - a token payment - a promise that in due time someone should come who by his death, would pay in full the price of Adam's transgression.

It is not surprising that this person had to be a male when we consider the following:-

a) The law in Eden was given to Adam when he was the sole human on the earth. We are not told whether it was later expressly given to Eve, but undoubtedly she understood the law to be binding upon her also (Genesis 5:5). At any rate, Adam was the responsible party though not actually the first to transgress.

b) Eve was formed from Adam's rib and can still be regarded as being “in Adam” or part of Adam, or, as he himself said, “bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:25), and in the same way that Levi is said to have paid tithes in Abraham (Hebrews 7:9), so also Eve may “be said to be in Adam.

c) God called their name Adam (Genesis 2), thus showing again that the man was responsible, and that the actions of Eve were done in, or under, his name.

B) The Saviour must be an Israelite.

This may not have been necessary for the salvation of the Gentiles, but for the Jews it was vital that he should be of their race, for they were under another law or system of laws, with its own benefits for adherents thereto and its own penalties for infringement. For some offences the penalty was death. Now, we read in Deuteronomy 27:26, “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them,” and in James 2:10, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” Therefore the children of Israel needed to be redeemed from the death penalty - even those who might not have committed sins worthy of death, and to do this their redeemer must also be under the same law.

C) The Saviour must be sinless.

Obviously a man under the sentence of death cannot be bought back by someone under the same sentence, and so it is necessary that the redeemer should be guiltless.

D) The Saviour must have a life to give.

It is obvious that a man cannot be said to give his life for someone else if he is bound to die in any case. Therefore a redeemer must possess a life which cannot be taken from him without his consent.

E) The Saviour must be willing.

It would not be just to exact from an innocent person the penalty due to a sinner but if the innocent one willingly offers to die in the place of the sinner then there is no injustice.

How Jesus fulfilled all these conditions.

A & B) Jesus was the son of Mary who was of the tribe of Judah. The law recognised Joseph, the husband of Mary, as the father of Jesus, but Joseph was also of the tribe of Judah.

C) There are many references which testify to the absolute sinlessness of Jesus.

For example:” “For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Hebrews 7:26). “For He hath made Him to be sin (sin-offering) for us, who knew no sin.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “For Christ also hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust.” (1 Peter 5:18). “He was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” (1 John 5:5).

D) Adam was the first Son of God (See Luke 5:58); Jesus, though not a new creation was the only begotten Son of God, for although He was born of Mary, His life came direct from God who was His Father. For this reason He is called the second man (1 Corinthians 15:47) or last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). As Jesus had a life unforfeited by transgression He had the right to eat of the Tree of Life like the first Adam before his transgression. Jesus Himself said; “As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5:26). “I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself, I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:17). “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

E) His voluntary submission to His Father's will was as complete during the sufferings on the cross as throughout the whole of His lifetime - “I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:15). “I lay it down of myself (John 10:18). “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:15). “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” (Matthew 26:59).

Why the Cross?

It was His Father's will that Jesus should endure the sufferings of the cross, and so we conclude that those sufferings must have been absolutely necessary. A natural death, i.e. one due to old age or 'natural causes', would not have sufficed. Most of us die a natural death, but this is not the penalty of sin, as even innocent babies die. The wages of sin is an inflicted death from which we are saved by belief in Jesus who, though Himself sinless, took our punishment upon Himself. Thus, by His sacrifice, we have been permitted to have life through Adam, whose life was spared on account of that first sacrifice, and those who are accounted worthy will later receive life more abundantly. (see John 10:10).

Paul states that “without shedding of blood is no remission” (i.e. of sin) (Hebrews 9:22 also Leviticus 17:11). This was in relation to the Law of Moses which pointed forward to Christ (Colossians 2:17 etc) and the principle still applies. Therefore the mode of death of the Saviour necessitated the shedding of His blood.

The Jewish method of execution was by stoning, but under the Roman law which was in force over the Jews at the time of Jesus, the method was crucifixion. Now, whereas it may be possible for a man to be stoned to death without the shedding of blood (by a blow on the head, for example) the crucifixion of Jesus made the shedding of blood a certainty, for His hands and feet were pierced in order to nail Him to the cross. And much more blood was spilled later when His side was pierced with a spear.

But since the blood shedding could have been brought about some other way there must be some other reason for the use of a cross. Paul explains the reason to us in Galatians 5:10-14. As has been mentioned before, the Law of Moses contained a curse “for everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” It is written in Deut. 21:25 and quoted in Galatians 5:15 that “cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.” By His suffering on that wooden cross Jesus took upon Himself that curse (of death) which the law held over the Jews, and by this means He redeemed the Jews from that curse “that the blessings of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 5:14).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To summarise, then, we of the Nazarene Fellowship are in agreement with most that is proclaimed week by week from Christadelphian platforms and we are very grateful for the experience of being in, or having been in the Christadelphian community. Our difference is seen in regard to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden for there is no evidence of any change taking place in their physical nature. This being so, Adam and Eve did not have sin abiding in their flesh as if it were a physical attribute, so neither could such a condition be passed on to their offspring. It follows then, that Jesus Christ could not have had sin-in-the-flesh and therefore it was quite unnecessary for Him to have had to die for Himself to cleanse Himself of this supposed defilement,

Our understanding of the Atonement is in keeping with the early Christadelphians and it is a sobering thought to realise that anyone holding the view that Adam's nature was changed to sin-in-the-flesh nature would have been (and indeed was) refused baptism prior to the change of direction of Robert Roberts in the 1870's. We are sure that if this false teaching was corrected it would naturally follow on to be seen that Jesus Christ died only for us, which of course gives Him the greater honour.

Jesus Christ loved us to the utmost and asks us to love one another likewise. It is in this spirit of love that we prepare and send out these Circular Letters and offer them to you for your careful thought. May we ask you to give these matters more than a superficial reading, for we have endeavoured to honour and glorify our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ for their great love and mercy which they have shown to us in calling us out to be a special people, giving us every opportunity to seek the way of life and in providing for our every need.

“Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” This cleansing, this purifying, this annulling of sin, is the work of God in Jesus Christ and this reference to Isaiah 1:18 is the occasion of our Creator's invitation to come and reason with Him upon this very subject, God is not the author of confusion and it is our desire that together, we may search the scriptures, rightly dividing the word, to seek for the truth of these matters, not for our glory, but for His. God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of our Lord. Let us render to the Father and the Son all the honour that is their due.

Can we possibly give more honour to our Creator than He merits? Of course we cannot! Or to the Son more than He merits? Again, we cannot. So let us see which gives Jesus Christ the greater honour - to say He had to die, or to say He chose to die? Again we ask which gives Jesus Christ the greater honour - to say, though He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin because He exercised His free will with great determination and thereby overcame every temptation, or to say He was able to overcome because He was given special strength to do so?

We must surely answer such questions for ourselves rather than leaving it to others to give us their opinions.

Jesus said “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” Let us be certain we have eternal life, for there is not much time left before He comes again.

“Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead that Shepherd of the sheep (made great by the blood of an Aeonian Covenant) even our Lord Jesus, knit you together in every good work, in order to do His will; producing in you that which is well pleasing in His presence, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for the Ages of the Ages.” (Hebrews 15:20-21. Emphatic Diaglott)

Amen.