

Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No 243

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Enclosed with this Issue are:

- 1) **“Behold The Man”**
 “Behold What Manner of Love”
 By Phil Parry

No Scripture allows Jesus to be man’s Representative. He was His Father’s Representative; the Word made flesh – “I and my Father are one” “I am in the Father and the Father in me” “He that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth...”

- 2) **Jesus My Substitute**
 By Andrew L. Wilson

“On perceiving for the first time the simple and satisfying understanding of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ which is possible when the false doctrines of Sinful Flesh and Original Sin have been renounced, many people express astonishment that such explanations have only recently come to light. Were it even so it would be no reflection upon the intrinsic value of the truths involved; but the fact is that they have been steadily and patiently advocated by a despised minority during almost the whole history of Christianity...”

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Editorial

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends,

Loving greetings. Micah was one of the 8th century BC prophets, contemporary with Amos and Hosea. He was a countryman from a town in south-west Judah, and his message is for Samaria and Jerusalem and he denounces the rulers, priests and prophets for their money grubbing, dishonesty in business and sham religion. Micah tells the people of Jerusalem and Samaria that God's judgment will fall on them but he also foresees a time in a glorious future, when Jerusalem will become the religious centre of the world, and Bethlehem give birth to a greater David who will rule over all God's people. Micah tells the population of these two capital cities that those in power are all on the make, and not fussy about the means they use. Far from promoting justice, the nation's leaders 'hate good and love evil'. Rulers, priests and prophets, there is nothing to choose between them - all have their price. But there will be a new Jerusalem from which God's word goes out to all people, and to which the nations will flock in an era of peace and plenty. God will bring home a remnant of his people. Salvation - rescue and restoration - will come.

In chapter 6 God sets out His case and lays out His charges against His people. Don't they know what pleases him? It is so plain and simple (verse 8). There can be no substitute for love and loyalty and fair dealing. Though they may try to buy Him off with extravagant offerings, God sees His people's dishonesty and He will punish sharp practice, violence and deceit.

In the final chapter the prophet opens his heart to us. He mourns for what is happening to his own people as society breaks down. Faithfulness, honesty and trust are all gone. The rot which began at government level has permeated the whole nation. Now all human relationships are crumbling. Friendship and family count for nothing. The human scene is black, but hope remains because Micah knows his God. He may still be relied on. His promise will not fail. He will build again and in His compassionate love He will forgive again.

So Micah will watch and wait. Just as we will watch and wait for the time when God will once again shepherd His people, doing miracles for them as of old, showing compassion: faithful to the age-old promises He made to the founding fathers of His people. Surely these chapters mirror our own times. Nothing changes with governments of whatever colour, in whatever age and whatever country. And if the human scene is black for us, and for much of humanity, we too, like Micah can rest assured that God will keep His promises.

"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal; The Lord knoweth them that are his. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2.19.

Love to all. Helen Brady.

THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD.

"I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

The world has a proverb – "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" - meaning that a present possession is better than hope for the future. All walks of life act upon this. To gain possession of honour and position, prosperity and wealth is considered praiseworthy and worth any means or sacrifice, often unscrupulous and God-dishonouring. Seeing this spirit so universal and all-successful, the "called-out" children of God are very apt to get discouraged when they are called upon to manifest exactly the opposite disposition, with no apparent present reward.

To give up the honours, emoluments, pleasures and profits of this present life while having the ability and opportunity to obtain and enjoy them, and to be made a laughing stock, a scorn, and a derision for doing so; to see the years slip away, the grave draw near, and to get apparently worse off, requires a sturdy, unwavering,

all-trusting faith that God will infallibly keep His promises. That is why faith, a belief in Him, His word and promises, though against all appearances, though one may lay down in the dust an apparent, utter failure, is so precious in His sight. It is reasonable that He should require it, should test it oft times severely, when one contemplates the unbounded immensity of the reward He has in store for those who manifest it.

Don't give up brother or sister; the pleasures and profits of this present life are alloyed, tainted, and very brief whereas the goodness of the Lord knows no ending, no limits, no marring. Believe to see it with all the ardour, love, longing faith and hope of your being, it is as sure as the ordinances of heaven and earth. Contemplation of it, obedient preparation for it will manifest the vanity of everything else; cheer, console and strengthen you till it is here.

W.J.L.

Extract from "The AEON" a Weekly Paper devoted to Scripture teaching.

"MY PEACE."

Does it sound strange and incredible to us to hear the Man of Sorrow's speaking about His peace - of giving up his peace; strange, as if some destitute man should propose and promise to put us in his will? Do we ask, "what manner of man is this," who, being Himself "destitute, afflicted, tormented," and brought face to face with cruel death, tells us that He is leaving His brethren the legacy of His peace? Then we have something yet to know and to learn concerning a perfectly holy experience, which we may well consider. That there were immeasurable depths of calm in the heart of Jesus, we feel quite sure. The mental picture which we get of Him leaves ineffaceable impressions - impressions of something so placid, so untroubled, that in His deepest sorrows it has never entered into our hearts to pity Him. In that calm brow, and quiet eye, and unhurried movement; in that silent steadfastness of bearing which nothing seems to shake or change, we feel the mystery of an unheard-of experience. There is in Him and about Him a serenity so profound that it lessens the marvel to us, that when He is near and says, "peace; be still," the billows of the sea sink to a watery sheet, and the roaring winds hush to death-silence. He does not strive nor cry, His voice is not heard in the streets, but walks through the agitated crowds, who press to hear him, clothed upon with composure; and even when He is threatened by His judge with death, in unfaltering mildness He replies, "thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."

And all this is no studied stoicism or affectation of indifference, for it is accompanied by signs of the most sensitive and tremulous sympathy for them whom He loves. The heart that knows no apprehension from Jewish fury and rage can yet weep over Jewish desolation. The undistracted feeling that can say to the scowling mob, "if ye seek me," can add the pleading word for the disciples - "let these go their way." To the wailing daughters of Jerusalem, He was able to say, even in the last agony - "weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children." Below, then, all tides of sympathy and currents of pity - down deeper than where the sounding lines of love could run - there were in Jesus depths and plenitudes of clear and calm repose, unbroken by a single wavelet of fear. It was this deep, ultimate consciousness He possessed which explains his mysterious mien - toning His life with the hue of peace, as the depths of ocean tone its waters with blue:

Can we go farther and explain the secret of this peace? Let us consider, in an endeavour to understand it -

1. His absolute conviction of the Truth.
2. His spotless purity of heart.
3. His incessant communion with God.

All through His history it is quite evident He "sees the end and knows the good." He is certainly "in the secret of the Lord," and never for a moment loses sight of the joy that is before Him. This is so true that it never occurs to us to ask whether Jesus could have doubts and misgivings, such as in our own moments of gloom flit before us. He holds His reason so steady, and keeps His heart so fixed, that we are led to forget He was tempted in all points as we are. But temptation never found Him off his guard. The prince of this world came, but found nothing in him - no loophole, no handle, no opening or opportunity whatever. When once

His nature spake within Him, in the brief soliloquy - "and now what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' His quick heart replied, "but for this cause camel unto this hour; Father, glorify thy name." How could there be other than peace where there existed such foundations of faith as these? Fastened deep down within Him more firmly than by hooks of steel; rooted in the certainties of His deepest intelligence, the Truth was secured for life - for life. The Baptist might doubt; His brethren might doubt; His disciples all might doubt, and fly this way and that, but never, till at His crucifixion, agony and loss of blood causes His poor brain to reel, does His full assurance of faith seem one whit affected. Equal to His persuasion of the Truth was His purity of personal righteousness. Without one painful recollection, or a blush, He can look straight into His Heavenly Father's eyes. His undivided consciousness is that He "does always those things that are well-pleasing to his Father." His "Father's business" is His simple occupation; His "Father's will" has become His "meat," and His "drink." With an eye so single, His whole body is full of light, and peace becomes His heart's element. In "doing the will of God," He is more firmly persuaded that the "doctrine" is divine also. Imagining for one moment any residuum of doubt left by the intellect, the heart has resolved it all, and now there is only pure, transparent peace as the substratum of all His feeling. He lives in two worlds. In the outer one, as for us, so for Him there is tribulation; but withdrawn far within from this is a sphere of experience, holy and private, where He hears only the Spirit's footfall - the paradise of His being where He (like the first Adam) walks and talks with God in the calm of the day.

Then how much, also, it must have ministered unto His peace, His constant communion with Heaven - who can tell? But a thousand things in His life and speech show how His spirit is clinging and cleaving to the Eternal Spirit that mysteriously resides in Him. That Spirit not only qualified Him for His Christly work, but formed a conscious bond of union between Him and His Father. Never did babe cling more closely to its mother's breast than did Jesus nestle to the Spirit which, rising infinitely above Him, yet gave Him its arms and bosom. In that sustaining presence He found retreat and peace, falling back upon it, especially, on all critical occasions.

It is the mistake of orthodoxy to suppose that the Spirit that dwelt in Christ gave to Him the divine nature. Not as a nature, but as a plenary investment did it fill and inspire Him. It filled Him with the power and wisdom of God, so that in Him we see the manifestation of the Father, but as to His nature, it left Him as entirely human as any of the prophets. In the sheltering presence of this Spirit He daily lived; finding fellowship therewith so comfortingly, that for Him the wells of peace were never dry.

The poet Burns speaks of one,

"By human pride or cunning driven
to mis'ry's brink,
Till wrenched of every stay but Heaven,
He ruined, sink'

but it cannot be that any one, really sustained by Heaven, can be "ruined," or can "sink." Christ was ever thus sustained and He sank not, but maintained a sublime composure to the end.

And He says "my peace I give unto you, my peace I leave with you." Can this mysterious experience be imparted to others then; and is there a beautiful contagion about this fine feeling? Can we hush our own fears by coming near to this calm presence, and soothe our agitations as He breathes upon us? Indeed we may; for we may enter into His secret and drink of His spirit. Since He has lived and overcome the world by the triumph of faith, we may dismiss all our fears and be filled with quietness. We may have "peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is easier to believe the truth because of his unshaken faith therein; His holiness encourages our efforts after righteousness; his recourse to the Spirit shows us how to cast our burden on the Lord. Let none murmur that the Spirit does not rest dynamically on them as on Him - depend upon it, "God is not far from any one of us," and all we want to know and to feel is that God is sympathetically near. We may communicate with God as really, though not in the same manner, as He did; so we may share His full assurance of faith. The mother's face and voice give peace to her child; the general's presence gives confidence to the soldiers; the traveller does not fear, for the guide is with him and though Christ is not visible to us, He is as real to our intelligence as if He were, and we can believe in God the more easily because we can believe in Him.

Christ is in simplest fact "our peace." He is the stay and anchor of our hearts; He bears us in His bosom, as a shepherd his lambs; we rest upon His words as on eagles' wings, and He would ever have it so.

"Not as the world giveth." Surely - most surely, no. The world's peace has never been more than an empty, broken promise, that has added disappointment to restlessness, and has repaid exertion with exhaustion and the sleep of death. The "world's peace!" O the irony! It is the tossing of fevered sleep; the vanishing mirage which burning thirst has never reached; illusive as a siren's song; barren as the grave!

But Christ's rich legacy of peace is an unfailing fund to them who will avail themselves of it. In rising to a higher sphere for awhile, He has left much behind Him. The world can never be the same to us as if He had not been here. That charmed life should also charm our fears, and shed its sunshine on our heads. It should breed assurance in us, because He has been here before us, and been perfected by the discipline through which we are called to pass.

Joseph Chamberlin.

We are grateful to Brother John Ching for posting this item on the Christadelphian Worldwide Forum. He writes, "I received this in an email. It was indeed such a beautiful story, that I just had to share it with you all":-

A Beautiful Parable An Oasis of Peace in the Midst of Noise

A woman came out of her house and saw 3 old men with long white beards sitting in her front yard. She did not recognize them. She said "I don't think I know you, but you must be hungry. Please come in and have something to eat." "Is the man of the house home?" they asked. "No", she replied. "He's out." "Then we cannot come in", they replied.

In the evening when her husband came home, she told him what had happened. "Go tell them I am home and invite them in!" The woman went out and invited the men in. "We do not go into a house together," they replied. "Why is that?" she asked. One of the old men explained: "His name is Wealth," he said, pointing to one of his friends, and said pointing to the other one, "He is Success, and I am Love." Then he added, "Now go in and discuss with your husband which of us you want in your home."

The woman went in and told her husband what was said. Her husband was overjoyed. "How nice!" he said. "Since that is the case, let us invite Wealth. Let him come and fill our home with wealth!" His wife disagreed. "My dear, why don't we invite Success?" Their daughter-in-law was listening from the other corner of the house. She jumped in with her own suggestion. "Would it not be better to invite Love? Our home will then be filled with love!"

"Let us heed our daughter-in-law's advice," said the husband to his wife. "Go out and invite Love to be our guest." The woman went out and asked the 3 old men, "Which one of you is Love? Please come in and be our guest." Love got up and started walking toward the house. The other 2 also got up and followed him. Surprised, the lady asked Wealth and Success: "I only invited Love. Why are you coming in?"

The old men replied together: "If you had invited Wealth or Success, the other two of us would've stayed out, but since you invited Love, wherever he goes, we go with him. Wherever there is Love, there is also Wealth and Success !!!"

Thank you John.

CONSISTENCY

Someone once wrote "Consistency - thou art a jewel," and anyone who has had experience of people who are inconsistent will appreciate the saying.

To make a profession of Christianity and to live and behave in ways inconsistent with the principles of Christ, brings religion into dispute and shows a person guilty of hypocrisy. One who is honestly trying to follow Christ will try to act in harmony with His teaching and example. When we succeed, this is true consistency - what we do is in accord with what we profess. When we fail, as most of us do far too often, we should recognise our fault and try to do better; this also is consistent. What is not consistent is to behave badly and neither admit that we have done wrong nor change our ways.

There is another equally important aspect of consistency, consistency in doctrine, and in this aspect also, whoever it was who described it as a jewel said no more than the truth. For ultimately, consistency is the test of truths. A thing which is true cannot be inconsistent with any other thing which is true. If there are more ways than one of stating a certain truth, no one of them will be inconsistent with any other. If we examine a statement and find that it is inconsistent with a known fact, then we can be sure that statement is false. Or if we have two statements which are inconsistent with each other, we can be equally sure that one of them at least is false. It may be that both of them are false - we can only judge as to that by testing them separately by some proved standard or authority. One thing however we can be quite sure of is that both cannot be true.

This is simple elementary logic but it is worth writing because it is often overlooked or ignored by people of whom we might expect something better.

Two articles in "The Christadelphian" magazine are the occasion of these remarks and if the matters were not so grave the foolish position of those represented would be laughable. We can only imagine the scorn which they would pour upon any other sect whose writings showed such incongruence. We can understand and allow for differences of view and interpretation, and indeed when these are no longer permitted progress and spiritual life will cease, but when we find fundamental contradictions on matters of basic importance we know that something somewhere has gone very wrong.

The first article is a reprint under the title, "Basic Principles" by Islip Collyer (p. 303) and the second is by the Editor, John Carter, and is a report of his journey in Australia in the effort for re-union. This writer never met Islip Collyer personally, though on one occasion we did find an opportunity to call on him, in the impartial hope of either gaining or imparting something useful, but Bro. Collyer sent out a message asking to be excused as he was resting. However, fudged by what we have heard from those who knew him and also by what we have read of his many excellent works, he was a man of high intelligence and exceptional character. That in spite of his obviously deep knowledge of scripture his mind appeared to be closed to the truth as we see it is a thing we cannot account for, but that is beside the point. Maybe it was not given him to understand - we may know someday. However, all the excellence of his writing cannot conceal the defect in his understanding resulting from his belief that sin is in some sense literally in human flesh.

In the course of his account of his visit to Australia, John Carter writes, referring to Romans 8, 3, "Therefore Paul adds that God condemned Sin, in the flesh - the flesh in question being the flesh that Jesus and all other men alike have. Much confusion has arisen from treating the phrase "sin in the flesh," which occurs but once, as a hyphenated expression."

Now, we of the Nazarene Fellowship can agree completely with what these words actually say, though we think that when Bro. Carter writes them he has something rather different in his mind from what we have in ours when we read them. Let me explain. We are agreed as to the flesh of Jesus being the same as the flesh of all other men, but we believe that God condemned sin by allowing to be inflicted upon Jesus the punishment that was due to sinners, whereas John Carter - if we report him correctly, and we think we do - John Carter believes that God condemned sin by requiring the flesh of Jesus to be repudiated and destroyed. Thus, our view is, death was due to us because we are sinners but Jesus voluntarily bore that death in our stead as a substitutionary sacrifice, whereas the Christadelphian view is that death is due to all men, including Jesus, because they are flesh and that his death was a ritual condemnation.

However, so far as what he actually says concerning Romans 8:3, we are agreed, and in particular we endorse his statement that much confusion has arisen from treating the words, sin in the flesh, as if they form a hyphenated phrase describing a property of human flesh. But while agreeing with him and glad to know that he does not believe this, we are bound to point out that this way of treating the words in question has been unquestioned ever since the days of Dr. Thomas and is, indeed, the very basis and foundation of the Christadelphian doctrine of the nature of man and the sacrifice of Christ. Anyone who reads Elpis Israel, The

Slain Lamb, Blood of Christ and the volumes of The Christadelphian at the time of the so-called Clean Flesh division will find the phrase, sin-in-the-flesh used in the very way which John Carter says has caused "much confusion." Who is it that has caused the confusion? Leading Christadelphians trying to defend an indefensible position!

On page 325 John Carter says that in Romans 5:8 Paul is using the figure of personification, representing Sin as a master who pays wages. This is perfectly true and is exactly the point made by Edward Turney 80 years ago which Robert Roberts scoffed at as "a marvellous piece of new-born wisdom." His successor has now discovered it to be true and while as we have said, this is a thing to be glad of, it is not very satisfactory for him to treat the view which R. Roberts held as if it were no more than the mistaken interpretation of a few extremists. It may be that there is now a perceptible body of opinion who would agree with John Carter; if so, both he and we know that it is very small and is the fruit of the literature circulated by we who are called Clean Flesh Heretics. The position in fact is that the view held practically universally by Christadelphians, is that the words, sin in the flesh, do constitute a phrase which implies that there is literally something in human flesh which Paul termed "Sin", which has to be destroyed by the death of Christ, and John Carter is - or perhaps we should say, appears to be less than honest when he writes as if the view he is now putting forward is Christadelphianism. If he himself, has forgotten, or chooses to ignore, the mass of evidence in the works of Dr. Thomas and Robert Roberts, he will hardly need us to remind him that there are those in his own fellowship at this moment who are active and vocal in propagating the doctrine that human flesh is literally full of sin and of its very nature obnoxious to God. A. D. Norris and W. F. Barling have left little unsaid which might serve to explain that the death of Christ was just and right because he had the Diabolos in his flesh. It is indeed hardly to be wondered at that there are those who charge him with the same heresy as ourselves, but the most remarkable thing of all is that they have only to turn over a page or two in the same issue in order to prove, not perhaps that he believes as we do, but at least that he does not believe the same as brethren as recent and eminent as Islip Collyer.

Thus we find, that while on page 526 the Editor issues his warning against treating Sin-in-the-flesh as a descriptive phrase, on page 303 he reprints the words of Bro. Collyer where he does exactly that thing. Here are his actual words :-

"When we speak of 'sin' in the flesh WE USE THE PHRASE just as the Apostle used it."

This statement in itself is untrue and he refers to the words as a phrase in the very way which John Carter says has caused confusion. It is when he goes on to explain what he supposed the Apostle meant when he used it that we see that to him (I.C.) the words carried the meaning that something (sin) was literally in the flesh.

He says sin is used in a derived or secondary sense and "It is a similar extension of meaning to that of the word 'death' for poison, when they said "there is death in the pot." Thus, reasoning by analogy, he argues:-

"There is death (poison) in the pot."

"There is evil (sin) in the flesh."

Again, in the same article (page 306) Bro. Collyer wrote :-

"The Apostle calls this physical weakness 'sin' in the flesh or 'sin' that dwelleth in me. It is the diabolos in human nature... we are born with it and if we give way to any sin... make 'sin' in the flesh more active."

No candid person reading these words could possibly question the fact that Islip Collyer believed the words sin in the flesh to be a phrase referring to sin as a quality of flesh, since he equates sin with the natural desires of the flesh and again with what he calls the diabolos in human nature. Yet, in the same issue a few pages further on, John Carter says this precise treatment has given rise to much confusion and he, himself, has now adopted the exposition originally put forward by Edward Turney!

Now no one would wish to deny Christadelphians the right to expound scripture in harmony with their own beliefs, provided they do it honestly, and, although it appears to us to be most illogical we must believe that Islip Collyer was sincere in his belief; furthermore there can be no doubt in the mind of anyone who has read their works that his view is substantially the same as that of Dr. Thomas and R. Roberts.

A Review of “Change Us, Not God”

A few weeks ago I received an email from one of our readers in Australia asking me if I would consider reviewing John Launchbury’s book “Change us, not God.” This I agreed to and so obtained a copy from Paul Launchbury. I had already seen reference to this work on the Christadelphian Worldwide forum so I could now discuss it more fully with others here also.

My first impressions of John Launchbury’s book, after a quick first read, was favourable and I considered the work very readable but I’m afraid first impressions didn’t last long. Upon a closer study of the work I began to feel there was too much left out and too much of little value put in. Who was the writer addressing? At times it seemed to be Sunday School scholars, other times he was putting forth his views on certain scriptures on which there have been vigorous theological arguments.

And why does the writer say so much about our names being written in the Book of Life during our life time and not at the time of the resurrection as though this is a new idea? Then he finished his section by saying we are told this in the scriptures “time and time and time again.”

And again, I must have forgotten that I once used to try and excuse my sin rather than own up to it and seek forgiveness but I really can’t recall ever trying to justify my wrong doing to God.

This brings me to the title of the book “Change us, not God” – has there ever been a Christian who would consider changing God and not him or her self? However the subtitle makes much better sense – “Biblical Meditation on the Death of Jesus”. This, I feel, should have been the title.

But a friend reminds me that “everyone deserves a fair and reasoned hearing.” (John 7:51).

So I must go on to the positive side - we are told early in the book that “the goal of this study is to try to recapture the simplicity of salvation as taught throughout the Bible. We will study the atonement (as it is often called), away from metaphors, allegories and symbolisms. We will lay aside analogies and instead concentrate simply on finding the basic principles.”

We appreciate the merit of this approach because metaphors, allegories and symbolisms have been widely misunderstood, misused and argued over, so they are perhaps best left out at least until some basic principles have been thoroughly absorbed and then they should naturally fall into their rightful places.

The book is divided into some 28 sections of roughly six or seven pages each, in which the writer gives brief expositions on about two hundred and fifty or so quotations dealing with a very comprehensive range of topics connected with the death of Jesus with encouraging exhortations on how disciples of Jesus should be influenced to live lives well pleasing to our heavenly Father.

The writer correctly rejects those theories on the atonement which have been added by the churches since the 3rd century showing the falsehood of their doctrines regarding the Ransom Theory; Satisfaction Theory and the Substitution Theory with their injustices and God-dishonouring concepts.

Under the heading “To Change Us” there follows quotes from Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Peter 2:21 and Philippians 3:10 exhorting us to see in the crucifixion the compelling need for us to respond to such love “that we should follow in his steps” “becoming like him.” Then the writer repeats an earlier proposition that there were two fundamental reasons for Jesus’ death, so on page 20 we read:

“1. His death is supposed to have a profound and transforming effect on us. It is the beginning of a process in which we must thoroughly participate, and

2. His personal sacrifice played a major role in the development and perfecting of Christ himself.”

He says “This proposition claims that the death of Christ was an event designed by God with natural consequences through cause and effect; those consequences affecting any of us who are willing to be affected by it, and profoundly affecting Jesus himself.””

I suggest we now come to the real purpose of the book, for next we read, “This is a bold proposition because most Christians were brought up on the idea that the death of Jesus was exactly about some kind of metaphysical or spiritual transaction, and not about natural cause and effect at all” and the writer proceeds throughout his work to show that no transaction was needed; just the cause and effect was sufficient.

The writer is keen to show us how the sacrifice of Jesus consisted of His entire work of preaching as well as His final yielding to His crucifixion, with His death on the cross not an essential part of our salvation for he says “We will see that God could always forgive us” - even without Jesus laying down His life for the sheep; even though He was delivered for our offences.

The writer, correctly in my view, having ruled out theological teachings of substitution and related transactional theories which were designed to satisfy God’s supposed need rather than our genuine need, continues over many sections, to consider aspects of the reasons for Jesus’ death. These sections show various ways in which we should be influenced for better by Jesus’ example of dedication to and love for His Father. I agree wholeheartedly with the exhortations in these sections. All of which should make us feel very humble indeed as we contrast this with our natural behaviour and should convince us of the need to follow His example and so bring us to God. “Not my will, but thine be done” and if we should do the same then our salvation is assured.

One portion in particular is very moving, where John Launchbury, on page 42 under the heading of “**Nowhere to lay his head**”, writes,

“On another occasion someone said, “I want to follow you!” Jesus said, “Are you sure? Do you know what it would be like to follow me, with nowhere to sleep?” (Luke 9:8). Peter said, “We’ve left everything to follow you” (Mark 10:28). If Peter, Andrew, James and John and all the others had indeed left ‘everything’ to follow Jesus, think how much more Jesus had already left! Everything! He had never had a wife, or children; never had a career; never had a house of his own, or any of the other comforts we crave in this life, not to mention all his inherent rights as son of God. It’s hard for us to conceive the complete and utter devotion of our Lord; pouring every aspect of his life into rescuing us from our path of destruction.

“I think Jesus had truly exhausted himself by the time he came to Golgotha. In the literal sense I mean. There was nothing left. He had given every part of his life. When Jesus said that Abraham had rejoiced to see his day and was glad, the response was, “You’re not yet fifty...! (John 8:56) This to a man in his early thirties! I wonder how old and tired he looked; pouring every ounce of his strength into serving the people around him, into building them up, rescuing them and saving them. By the time he arrived at Golgotha he had already emptied himself. There was next to nothing left. And having emptied himself, he enacts his final declaration. ‘I give every part of me to you, my Father.’”

It was surely a very exhausted Jesus who stood before Pilate and Herod after a night of no rest, and little wonder He was the first to die on the cross – a merciful release not given to the other two victims who had their legs broken. O, the horror of crucifixion!

To continue with my analysis, I wish to give one example where I feel the writer assumes too much. On page 18 the writer quotes from John 14:30,31, “*I will not speak with you much longer for the Prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*” Of this the writer says:

“This seems to capture the sense of the original text very well. We are now only about twelve hours before the crucifixion, and Jesus explains to the disciples what is going on. The world is being taught a double lesson, he says, the world must learn (a) I love the Father and (b) that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.” He continues,

"If we want a commentary of the purpose of the crucifixion from the lips of Jesus himself, then we should highlight this verse. It may not reflect the whole story, of course, but it is the aspect he chooses to emphasize just a few short hours before his death. He does not speak about a transaction in heaven. Rather, he highlights an impact on earth: the world must learn something from what is about to occur."

Certainly Jesus said "the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me" but I do not believe that Jesus shows the purpose of the crucifixion in this verse. Jesus never at anytime showed the purpose of His crucifixion. For the simple reason that He would never boast! "Look at me. Just look and see what I am about to do for you!" No! Such was never Jesus' way of course. Even at such an hour as this He expressed humility and loving kindness in saying He wants people to learn, over time.

While the need for the Messiah was told in the Old Testament, it was left to the Apostles to explain the purpose of the crucifixion. We find the most detailed explanation the Apostle Paul's writings, especially his letter to the Romans, but I don't want to select one as more important than another for they all give us insights into the work of God in Jesus. But Jesus Himself held back from explaining what He was going to do at the end of His ministry, and at no time, from the moment John the Baptist proclaimed "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" to His resurrection did He tell anyone the reason for His laying down of His life. The nearest He came to it was in His discourse in John 10:11-15 "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep." But the disciples didn't understand and Jesus didn't try to explain further. (Mark 9:32).

To some this may not seem a major point, depending on what one has in mind regarding the reason for the crucifixion or how one sees it as part of the purpose of God. But I believe it is.

On page 27 the writer shows a contrast between the sacrifices under the Law of Moses with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in as much as all the sacrifices for sin under the Law were commanded by God and were carried out as He instructed as acts of righteousness; yet the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was carried out by sinful and unrighteous men who had refused to do God's will and whom He destroyed for their wickedness (Matthew 21:41). Those carrying out the sacrifices under the Law of Moses were doing God's will, whereas those who crucified Jesus were cruel murderers who despised the Son of God. Thus he concludes that the sacrifices under the law were not types of which Jesus was the Antitype.

He also shows that the laying on of hands symbolically transferring the sins of the people on to the Scape-goat is not necessarily the correct understanding, as the word "laid" which comes from "the Hebrew root word *pga* (pronounced pa-gah) which, according to some concordance work shows us that the idea of *pga* is actually that of meeting or encountering rather than any ritual laying on of hands. So Isaiah 53:6 is likely to be saying something very plain: "The Lord had him encountering the iniquity of us all."

The same word (*pga*) occurs later in Isaiah 53:12, "For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession (*pga*) for the transgressors." "Made intercession" is very different from "encountering".

So the writer asks, who offered Jesus as a sacrifice? And concludes that "It was Jesus who offered Jesus as a sacrifice." "The act of submission was the one act of righteousness that was taking place in those events at Golgotha. Everyone else involved in the killing that day were engaged in raw sin. Murderous intent."

The exhortation following these notes is that it was ordinary civilized people like us who murdered Jesus and they did so because Jesus was good, He was sinless and they rejected Him because they were opposed to good. What does that tell us about the sinfulness of sin! "As disciples we are holy people. Not in a self-righteous sense; but holy when we let the holiness of our Lord be upon us allowing his love and peace to reflect itself in our lives..."

In this very brief, partial and I feel, inadequate review the writer's purpose seems to me to have been to show that the death of Jesus is supposed to have such a profound effect upon our characters as to transform us into subjects suitable for His Kingdom, and also Jesus death played an even greater role in Himself as to perfect Him to be King.

But I wonder if the writer feels he has "recaptured the simplicity of salvation taught throughout the Bible." I am not convinced. I believe John Launchbury has overlooked two or three important Bible teachings which closely concern his subject, and these I wish to discuss in our next Circular Letter.

With love in Jesus to all. Russell.

Human Nature

Dear Brethren and Sisters,

Those of us who know the difference between Christianity and Churchianity are aware that a person who is only used to the latter does not at first, understand or properly value many things concerning the former. This is so because Christianity is one thing, Churchianity another. Churchianity is presumed to be good because no one will say otherwise, presumed efficient because the majority are too indifferent to enquire into its merits.

It is something like this with respect to Human Nature. Human nature is presumed to be intrinsically evil, because Churchianity permits the continuation of evil, deprive the majority of the incentive to be otherwise, and entrenches the evils of life by reason of its philosophy.

Christianity says, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1 Corinthians 15:34); Churchianity says, "Human nature is heir to sin and is therefore a sinful element."

It does not seem to matter that the latter phase of doctrine is scripturally unsupportable and that it deals only with the negative aspect of human nature. They continue to probe it with such clinical exactitude that human behaviour daily degenerates to an exact pattern of the evil and degenerated doctrine.

It is time now to explore the positive side of human nature, because human nature is not a commodity descriptive of human behaviour until the possessor of that nature is equitable to both good and evil.

We do not call an acorn oak, expect milk from a calf, or harness a colt to a load of burden, because we know in our hearts that all these things are a growth of law.

Well, so is human nature a growth of law.

A child or heathen is not of a nature that can be described as evil, because evil nature is the epithet of a person who can but will not discern good from evil.

This is a truth that is fundamental to the whole scheme of things.

Adam was a sinner because he could have done good; Christ was righteous because He could have done evil, for as Paul says, "sin is not imputed where is no law" (Romans 5:13); "where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15); "nay, I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shall not covet" (Romans 7:7).

Clearly, sin is the knowing the good and doing the other, and good the knowing of evil and refraining from it.

It follows then, that a child or heathen, being unaware of the good, is not the proper subject from which we can determine whether human nature is universally evil.

Indeed, a child or heathen is amenable to no law inasmuch that the circumstances which prevent him from accepting Christ, are the circumstances which preclude him from rejecting Christ, and is, therefore, included with those of whom it is said, "as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law" (Romans 2:12), which means to say that a child or heathen is doctrinally not a sinner.

Now if sin is the virulence of sinful flesh and sinful nature, how is it that a child or heathen, who is incapable of sin, is of sinful flesh or of sinful nature?

The answer is with John: "Sin is the transgression of law" (1 John 3:4) which is but saying what Jesus had already said, "If I had not come and spoken unto you, you had not had sin," or, "If ye were blind, (unintelligent), you should have no sin" (John 15:22; 9:41).

This means that we must be able to recognise "who" and "what" Christ is before we become sinners.

The conclusion with regards to human nature is this: human nature as a commodity descriptive of human behaviour is manifest in a person only when he is aware of "who" and "what" Christ is.

These passages prove that a person must be endowed with the strength proper to him before his nature can exhibit a law of ethics and morals.

In other words, he must have eyes, ears and heart to understand the law which says, "beware of unrighteousness," before he can violate the law to become evil natured.

Now, what of the doctrine which says we are prone to sin?

We know that Adam was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), in that God gave Adam a measure of wisdom, justice, love and power, made him a free moral agent, free to choose to do right or wrong, good or evil, obey or disobey - did his sin deprive us of any of these attributes?

The answer is, No; because by virtue of the fact that we are alive to-day as the result of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8) and that we are able to understand Jesus' invitation, "Come, follow me" (Matthew 8:22) - we have not lost one iota of the wisdom, justice, love and power into which Adam was created.

Indeed, it is only here that the fullness of God's love manifests itself, for we must remember that we have now attained unto the fullness of the law, and are able to discern good from evil.

Therefore, our inheritance from Eden is not one of inability in Adam to do right, but one of ability in Christ to do right. This means to say that we are, without Christ compelled to fashion our thoughts on those lines which concern themselves with material things in a material realm, and our needs and behaviour limited to the extent that we can only seek and find relationship with other men or as the Bible puts it, "God hath appointed our bounds that we cannot pass" (Job 14:4).

But now Christ says, "Come, follow me."

If we accept this invitation it means for us that we are able, through Christ, to transform our thinking on these lines which are compatible to the will of God. We become alive, alert, patient and teachable in what is required of us in God. Christ endues in us that transforming and regenerating agency by which we can make ourselves what we will. We can seek and find relationship with God and Christ; we can eliminate those thoughts that hitherto contained us within those bounds that we could not pass. Christ makes us masters of our own destiny unto life, as was Adam had he so chosen.

We can be "steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the works of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

We shall know and declare as Paul did, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13), for "Christ having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself" (1 Corinthians 1:20). This, surely, includes the ability to overcome sin.

Nonetheless it pleases human vanity to believe that we suffer and sin because of the sin of Adam, but not until man has extirpated every evil, bitter and impure thought from his mind will he ever be in a position to know and declare that his sins are the result of Adam and not his own sickly, deceitful mind.

God did not make Cain Cain or Abel Abel; Abel was Abel and Cain was Cain because the law of human nature is such “that as a man thinketh in his heart, so it he” (Proverbs 23:7).

Human nature is but the outer garment or the mirror image of our inner state.

Abel was pure minded, pleasant and virtuous, and possessed all things in his mind that made and fashioned a human nature that God was pleased to describe “righteous” (Hebrews 11:4).

Cain on the other hand was envious, base and criminally minded and thus made and fashioned a nature that stooped to murder (Genesis 4:8)

Human nature is made and fashioned by the quality of thoughts we encourage; we cannot think good and evil; neither can we think evil and good.

James puts it this way: “Doth a fountain send forth at the same time sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree bear olive berries? Either a vine figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh” (James 3:11,12); nor human nature good and evil but only good or evil.

Proof of this within every one of us: kind thoughts crystallise into habits of kindness and solidify into acts of love and Godliness; selfish thoughts crystallise into habits of self-seeking and selfishness and solidify into acts of hate and violence.

It is the law of human nature. For just as wheat will only come from wheat, and nettles from nettles, so will only a nature that is fine and noble come from thoughts that are clean and pure, and likewise only a nature that is mean and nasty will come from thoughts that are grovelling.

As Jesus declared, “a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matthew 7:18), which is but saying that only good will come from a nature that is good, and only evil will come from a nature that is evil.

“I and my Father are one” (John 10:30) is a declaration made by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; it is a declaration that is little understood, but those who do understand it knew it to mean that Jesus was one with God in thought and nature, and that they are in complete unity.

Such also is the case with thought, character and human nature; they are one in precisely the way Jesus would have us believe He is one with God.

Thought is character, and character is but another name for a person’s nature, and which is made and fashioned by the quality of thought he most cherishes.

This is illustrated in Peter’s enquiry to Ananias, “Ananias, why hath satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?” (Acts 5:3,4).

Such a question not only shows that satan is sin but the evil imagination of the heart and mind, and it also shows that every sin is created by the heart and mind, which is exactly what is meant by the declaration, “every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin” (James 1:14,15).

Just as a plant cannot grow when the seed is absent, so neither can sin formulate itself when the heart and mind is absent of evil inclinations.

We read, “as the garden causeth the things sown in it to spring forth” (Isaiah 61:11), so also does the mind cause the things sown in it to spring forth to a nature that is compatible to the thought, because a like action always proceed from a like agent, and always reach a perfect likeness to the agent.

It may be instinctive for our nature to perform any manner of deed, but that deed is always compatible to the nature, whether it be good or evil.

In other words a sin can never be primarily or singularly the result of a so called spontaneous or unpremeditated act, because every deed, every act, is the direct result of the thought that is most predominant and most encouraged, which is but saying, “a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil” (Luke 6:45).

If we cherish and cultivate noble and God-like thoughts the law of our being is such that our natures become God-like, and likewise if we harbour bestial thoughts our natures inevitably become beastly, because human nature is made or unmade by the thoughts we have built into our characters, for as we have already noted, “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

We will recollect the decree denounced against man after the fall (Genesis 3:17-19), “cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shall thou eat of it all the days of thy life, thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and in the sweat of thy face thou shall eat bread” - that is, by hard work you shall procure it.

We see this curse fulfilled in the present day; the ground if left to itself everywhere brings thorns and thistles.

In like manner the hearts and minds of men are fully set to think and do evil unless they look to Christ, and thereby submit themselves wholly to Christ.

We have His forgiveness and peace through the blood of His cross, and His assurance that we can avoid and conquer every manner of sin, as for instance, “Sin no more” (John 5:14; 8:11).

In the natural world we understand the law which says “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7), therefore we work and co-operate with it to stave off starvation and because we know the decree just mentioned is more significant in its demand of the sweat of the face than is the grounds inability to produce other than thorns and thistles.

Now this law is as simple and undeviating in its applicability to the mental and moral world as it is to the natural world, but men will not understand it; therefore they do not work or co-operate with it and like Balaam, who knew the Word of God and taught it to others, we go on adding sin to sin until iniquity will also be our ruin.

We recognise the threat, “know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (Romans 6:6), but we prefer to rely upon such proof as the apparent want of success over sin to be our guide, whereas a mere glance at the written Word of God shows that the Word of God is against making any principle, save the mental and moral principle, a determining factor in our ability or inability to overcome sin.

Why, says Jesus, “be ye perfect, as your Father, which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

If this was impossible it would hardly be recorded that sixteen persons were of natures that were “righteous” (Hebrews 11).

Righteousness is not a comparison such as the prayer, “I am not as other men” (Luke 18:11), but a word that denotes a comparison and a fulfilment of a conduct that is within the laws of ethics laid down by God.

Evil passions or sinful practices to which we often give way or delight in do not derive from something that is within our flesh, they are the result of desires that are contrary to those things which God has deemed good for us, because everything that is natural is good, right and beneficial.

We need only search our minds and ask ourselves, Why is it that most of us avoid infamous sins, and why is it that we succumb to those petty little sins that are popular to society? Is it not because we cherish the company of men rather than that of God and Christ? And is it not because we have little care for the law's contempt for murder and such like?

The day will dawn when we will have little care for the contempt that Christ has for those so called, respectable airs, for as He has said, "no man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24).

If one thing contributes to sin more than any other it is the ignorance and disregard we have for the Word of God. It is time now to ask ourselves if we have found any book which contains better advice, or more important truths than the Bible. It is only by reading the Bible are we able to enter into the feeling of what is good for us, for it alone is able to make us wise unto salvation. Especially ought we to analyse Paul's conduct and behaviour; we should try to understand the trials and struggles he encountered, the suffering and punishment he endured, the sacrifices he made, and the undaunted effort he put forth to keep intact his faith in Christ. He not only loved Christ but he also hated everything that was not in Christ. "I therefore so run," says he, "not as uncertainly, so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Corinthians 9:26,27).

Paul well knew that "to love God and Christ, is to hate all evil" (Proverbs 8:13).

My friends, so must we, for that alone is the means by which we are enabled to overcome sin.

We are somewhat more fortunate than Paul, for we are not likely to meet the difficulties as he, for, as Jesus has said, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30).

B. D. Lewis

The “Good News” in the Old Testament

Psalm 23 is undoubtedly the best known; it has been used throughout Christendom in many of its services of celebration, funerals, weddings, feast-days, coronations, confirmations, and baptisms. For nearly three thousand years it has been enjoyed by people for its prose and poetry, that raises the aspirations of the heart. It brings before us hope, peace, consolation and a yearning for better things to come and its universal appeal brings to many the opportunity of seeing the blessings God is offering to those who see Him as their Shepherd.

There is nothing in this Psalm to indicate for what occasion it may have been written. There is no historical reference; no suggestion of a time or circumstance in the life of David and such hope as it expresses could be made by a pious heart in any circumstance.

The Psalm in six verses contains at least ten symbols or pictures; first shepherd, green pastures; still waters; paths of righteousness; a shadowy valley; rod and staff; a laden table; a cup; an anointed head; and a house. And one commentator says that it reveals seven aspects of God, or as he put it, seven names of Jehovah. These show God as a Provider, Protector, Guide, Saviour and a Rewarder of the faithful. Some commentators suggest it was written in David's later years looking back and seeing the care God had shown him during his very varied life. The overriding theme of this Psalm is God's watchful care and provision. The phrase "I shall not want" embraces all that follows; the Shepherd providing for all his needs, both materially and spiritually. David wrote in Psalm 34, "O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him- And they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

Through the Gospel message we are enabled to take this Psalm to ourselves, for we have God's Son for our Shepherd, and in His prayer, in John 17, Jesus said, "I pray for them which thou hast given me for they are thine. All mine are thine, and thine are mine." So now that all things are in Him and through Him we have

become His sheep for He redeemed us; we belong to Him because He bought us - He purchased us with His blood. Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd," "for the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." And He promised, "How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" Again, "Ask and it shall be given you, for everyone that asketh receiveth." Then if "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

With the promise that all our temporal needs will be met, Jesus turns our attention to our greater need, when He said, "Seek not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, neither be of doubtful mind. You heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of these things, but rather seek ye the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." This is promised to those who feed upon the Word; this is the pasture in which He makes us to lie down - in green pastures of tender grass. The sheep don't only feed here, they rest and are refreshed here; they are at peace and they enjoy the recreation of meditation in repose. Their food is pleasant, sweet and satisfying.

In many of his Psalms David refers to his pleasure of meditating upon the Word of God. In Psalm 104 he writes, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to God while I have my being. My meditation of Him shall be sweet. And I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways, I will delight myself in thy statutes I will meditate on all thy works. I will muse on the works of thy hands. I stretch forth my hands unto thee. My soul thirsteth after thee" (119 Psalm), "The godly delight in the law of God and in his Lord doth he meditate day and night, and he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters." These passages only hint at the wealth of food provided for the sheep; the Word of God has pleasures beyond our imagination, and far beyond our expectations.

The importance and necessity of the knowledge of the Word was given to Moses and quoted by Jesus in His hour of temptation, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Jesus of course had other needs which were unique to Him. He said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." God's work began in Eden and Jesus finished this work when God laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and He said "It is finished." This was God's work and now that He (Jesus) had become the Shepherd He could continue to lead the faithful. We read, "He leadeth me beside still waters," and water, as we all know is essential to all natural life. But it is also used to express the dependence we have on God's provision on things of the Spirit. Sometimes referred to as "living waters" or "waters of life." Only available from God through Jesus. Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, "If thou newest the gift of God and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest ask of him, and he would have given thee living waters. Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The other water in Scripture is the water of baptism referred to in verse 3, "He restoreth my soul," literally he causes my life to return. This may suggest a revival or renewal after being downcast by cares and troubles but surely in the context of this Psalm it refers to the true renewal of life, of being born again unto newness of life. It was in the waters of baptism, where the paths of righteousness began.

We read, "For he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." That is the right paths, the right ways. The paths that lead to God Himself. He doesn't suffer us to wander into the path which leads to shame; He leads by the way of righteousness, in the way of life. These paths are opportunities to show whose we are and whom we serve. This promise of opportunities is made for His Name's sake, that His name may be honoured by all that we do. It is for the sake of Him who died for us, that His work should not be in vain, and ultimately that the whole earth may be filled with God's glory. He leads the willing; in Psalm 25:9, "the meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach his ways. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant, and his testimonies." Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

In John chapter 10 we read how Jesus saw His sheep, "When he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him for they know his voice," and later, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish. My Father which gave them me is greater than all and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." These promises of

guidance follow the restoring of life, follow, baptism; it is now for the sheep to listen to the voice, or words of Jesus and to follow where He leads, even to the free gift of righteousness.

Verse 4 of Psalm 23, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." The thought follows on from the previous verse that the paths may prove dark and gloomy, in fact may be dismal or threatening, but have no fear, for God is with him and will guide him through. But if applicable to death itself this for His sheep it is only the shadow of death, not the substance. Jesus showed His disciples what death was when He allowed Lazarus to die; He also allowed His disciples to misunderstand His words, when He said "Lazarus sleepeth." They thought he was getting well and there was no need to concern themselves, but Jesus had to tell them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

Jesus took this opportunity to show them His and His Father's view of the death of those to be raised. They slept, they did not die. In the sight of God they were remembered for resurrection, they are the faithful. In Malachi we read, "They that feared the Lord spake oft one to another and the Lord hearkened and heard it and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." On many occasions Jesus said plainly that those who believed on Him should never die and He also said they should not taste death. In Jesus our life may only be interrupted by sleep in Him. Paul tells us that some will not even sleep; they will be changed in the twinkling of an eye at Christ's return.

Some of the sayings of Jesus prove difficult for some to accept at their face value, for instance, "Verily, verily I say unto you, if a man keep my sayings he shall never see death." And because He said this the Jews said, "Now we know thou hast a devil." This may be a heard saying for some. On another occasion some of His disciples left Him because of hard sayings. In John chapter 6 we read, "The Jews strove among themselves saying How can this man give us His flesh to eat." and many of His disciples murmured at it. "And from that time many of his disciples went back and left him and walked no more with him." These hard sayings of Jesus troubled many that heard Him and they lost patience because they were not seeking or looking for the Truth, otherwise they would have waited for Jesus to enlighten them in due time, as did the faithful twelve, though they did not understand were nevertheless eager to stay with Him to hear more, and when Jesus asked them if they would leave Him, Peter replied, "Lord to whom shall we go. Thou hast the words of eternal life." Though they didn't know or understand how Jesus was to accomplish this, they knew from the Scriptures that all that God had promised would be revealed by His Son.

If any of the sayings of Jesus are hard to reconcile with some of our understanding of other Scripture we must be patient. We must not be tempted to avoid His plain statements nor qualify them to the detriment of their meaning. We must wait patiently for deeper Truth to appear as we grow in understanding and appreciation. As Peter tells us, we must "grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." We must be patient and wait for deeper truths to appear as we grow in knowledge, faith and understanding. We must not only hope to grow in grace and understanding, we must seek it diligently, not to reconcile different aspects of truth by qualifying them, saying, yes it is true because it was said by Jesus and then to remove the plain statement with a complicated explanation of what we think He meant. We have, all through the years, heard attempts to explain apparent difficult statements by those who feel it necessary to bring forward an explanation at any cost, often removing most of the obvious plain truth in an effort to make their understanding appear complete and comprehensive, and we are left with little of value. Dr Thomas wrote, "Must a man never progress. If he discover an error in his premises must he for ever hold to it for the sake of consistency? May never such a calamity ever befall me. Rather let me change every day till I get it right, at last." It can be noted his last writings revealed different premises from his earlier works.

The object of our pursuit of truth is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. The growth and development of our knowledge and understanding is essential to our appreciation, and our appreciation is the basis of our ability to find in ourselves a capacity to love God. This, the first commandment, can only be attempted if it is our principle aim and ambition. So let the words of Jesus stand true whether we understand them or not. In this way we may keep the door open to deeper understanding, deeper faith, a deeper love for God and Jesus Christ our Saviour, and a deeper love for our brethren. They are the only people we can share with in these matters, the only ones who can help us, and the only ones we can help in our walk before God.

The end of verse 4 reads. “Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me” and some see correction and chastisement in these symbols and we know that the Lord chasteneth every son whom he receiveth. Let us read a few verse from Hebrew 12,5-14, “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise thou not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom, he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? and if ye be without chastening whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which have corrected us and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of Spirits and live? for they verily for a few days chastened us after there own pleasure, but He for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be good but grievous but nevertheless, afterwards it bringeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.”

Some commentators see the rod as a defence against attacks on the sheep. David when defending his sheep slew wild animals among which we are told was a bear and a lion, but the staff would serve an entirely different purpose. Its principle use was in preventing the sheep from going their own way, particularly when being brought to the door of the sheepfold for their own protection for the night. There is a story that the shepherds of Israel, in the heat of the day, would rest in the shade of a rock or tree, but leave their cloak draped over their staff which had been stuck in the ground so that the sheep would see it there and keep it in sight as they grazed or rested - the shepherd leaving his garment as a witness to his presence, thou he was unseen. Our Shepherd has left us a witness to His presence in the bread which we partake of in memory of Him. The bread which represents His body which He gave us for a covering that our sin might be hid or covered in the sight of God, and part of the price He paid to release us from sin, paid by Him who knew no sin. Jesus said, “Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you.” “Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

Jesus comforted His disciples on several occasions- “Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me” and “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I unto you, let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Just before His crucifixion, when He knew He would do what He had resolved to do, He said, “These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer (sometimes rendered, of good comfort), I have overcome the world.” By overcoming the world, He had through over three years kept His resolve to fulfil His role as the Lamb of God that at the end of these years of trial and suffering He knew that He had but a short time to go before He would accomplish all that God had asked of Him, and that He would remain steadfast to the end. This is what He was promising them, but at that time they didn’t understand all that He had to do, but He told all He could, to comfort them because He knew they would be in great distress when He went to the Cross, to Calvary.

Verse 5 - “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” All the good things that God has provided do not diminish because of adversity.

However besieged we may be by circumstances or the actions of others not seeking our good or perhaps seeking our ill, God’s provision is more likely to increase. In deed, adversity itself may help us to be directed back to God and seek His ever present help. Jesus said. “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven.” Seeing God’s provision and bounty makes light of adversity, his enemies fade into the background as he count blessing in times of trouble.

The latter part of the verse - “Thou anointest mine head with oil and my cup runneth over,” - these two phrases show the extravagance, if we can use such a word, of God’s blessings. The pouring of oil over his head unto fatness, as it says in the margin, the over-filling of his cup shows God’s abundant favour or grace, blessings, prosperity and joy. A stage further from the previous verse - now to an ecstasy of joy and if understood from a spiritual point of view, David could see all that his greater Son would do, and all that it would mean to him. “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.” (Psalm 17:15).

Peter wrote of Jesus, "Jesus, whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." David wrote, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." In Psalm 16 he also wrote. "In thy presence is fullness of joy. In thy right hand are pleasures for ever more."

The last sentence of Psalm 23, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." In several Psalms he wrote of the house of the Lord - in Psalm 65 he wrote, "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto thee that he may dwell in thy courts, and blessed are they that dwell in thy house. They will be still, praising thee." Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also." This ultimate expectation of David includes this picture of the blessings of God to be given to the faithful.

This Psalm is for the sheep. It is their statement of faith. It does not begin with a proposition or a qualifying statement. It states plainly, The Lord is my Shepherd. Only the sheep therefore can make it their own. And of course only the Shepherd can provide all its blessings, and only the man born to be King could become, by the Grace and provision of God, the Shepherd of the sheep. When Jesus was born He was born heir to all things. Born to be King. When He was baptized by John, God anointed Him to be the Lamb to take away the sin of the world, and just over three years later, years of preparation, He laid down His life for His sheep and became the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Now having all power to put into effect all the promises of God.

Among many of His parables showing the work He had to do for His Father, are two which show the principles of Redemption. Matthew chapter 13, we read, "The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hid in a field the which when a man findeth he hideth and for Joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field." The field is the world. The treasure is those that fear God. The man is Jesus Christ and His going away is to the grave where He gave all that He had - the price He paid was His life. In the next verse Jesus is the Merchant who discovered a pearl of great price, and he again went away to sell all that he had to buy it, clearly giving of His wealth, His life, to make the purchase of His hearts desire, for we read, "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied."

Looking back over this Psalm we see no mention of judgment or condemnation. The wicked and evil doers are not in this picture at all, and there is a very good reason for it. These sheep with their Shepherd are the redeemed therefore there is now no condemnation for they are in Him. Jesus said, "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my words, (my sheep hear my voice), and he that believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation." The Greek word is judgment. It is used condemnation several times and Judgment over forty times - the same word in the Greek. Shall not come into judgment or condemnation, but is passed from death into life. This unspeakable gift is the Love of God in giving us the free gift of righteousness brought to us by the blood and sacrifice of Jesus our Redeemer, who has redeemed us from all unrighteousness.

Many Scriptures like the 23rd Psalm should draw us irresistibly towards God's care and provision. For we need a large share of hope and faith and a knowledge of His Word and an appreciation of His Love to find in ourselves the wonder and love so essential to our walk before Him. Only by understanding the true nature of His love can we offer perfect praise. In one of our writings some years ago a brother wrote "Redemption is a 50 50 affair. Not so! If Jesus gave His life for the sheep and all that that entails, what would be our share? on a 50 50 basis? For all we have belongs to God and our lives are already forfeit, what is left for us to offer? What can we give? A loving and contrite heart, bent on serving Him and bringing before Him our gratitude and our sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise. Luke 17:10, "When ye shall have done all those which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

A thought from the letter to the Colossians, Paul wrote, "to fulfil the word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations but now is made manifest to his saints, to whom God will make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

We will conclude with a few verse from Hebrews 13, "Now the God of peace that brought again, from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make

you perfect in every good work, to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, that through Jesus Christ to whom be glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

Brother Ray Gregory.

HABAKKUK

(Embrace)

Particulars not known; probably of the tribe of Simeon; and a native of Beth – Zaccur (House of the mindful).

1. The burden. Hammassa signifies not only burdensome Prophecy. But the prophecy or Revelation itself: Which God presented to the mind of Habakkuk and which he saw clearly. Perceived in the light of prophecy; then faithfully declares it as the book shows: The Oracle or revelation in general; (future calamities).

2. O Lord, how long shall I cry, of violence Thou wilt not hear and save – see Lamentations 2:1-8. Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore... iniquity, AMAL – labour, toil, distress, misery, the fruits of sin.

There are that Raise up strife and contention; (active) - **3-4.** Therefore the Law is slacked; judgement doth never go forth, like priest, like people; for the wicked, doth compass about the Righteous; therefore wrong judgement proceedeth; Job. 21:7. Wherefore do the wicked live; become old, yea are mighty in power; Psalm 94:3. Lord how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? Appeal. Jeremiah 12:..

Righteous art Thou O LORD; when I plead with Thee; Let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are they all happy that deal very treacherously?

5. Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously; rest of verse quoted by Paul Acts 13:40,41. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

6. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans (Russia) that bitter and hasty nation (cruel and oppressive) to possess that which is not theirs. God's land. Daniel 11:44,45. "But tidings out of the East and out of the North shall trouble him - therefore he shall go forth with great fury to destroy and utterly make away many. And he shall plant the tabernacle of his palace between the seas in the glorious Holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end and none shall help him."

7. Self aggrandisement. Margin, Shall proceed of themselves. (the judgement of those and the captivity of these.

8. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, more fierce than evening wolves: (destroyers). Ezekiel 38:8-11. "After many days thou shall be visited, in the latter days thou shall come into the land that is brought back from the sword; and is gathered out of many peoples; against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste but is brought forth out of the Nations and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou shall ascend and come like a storm, thou shall be like a cloud to cover the land, thou and thy bands and many people with thee; Thus saith the LORD GOD - it shall come to pass that at time same time, shall things come into thy mind and thou shalt think an evil thought, and thou shall say I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them, having neither bars nor gates."

9. They shall fly as an eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come for violence; their faces sup up the east wind; (from travellers). Wind sups up all moisture, and captivity as the sand. (prisoners and desolation).

10. And they scoff at the kings and princes shall be a scorn to them. They deride all resistance.

11. Then shall his mind change. Imputing this his power to his god, Nisroch. (eagle) Chaldea, Communism and socialism. (Russia).

V. 14-17. “And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as creeping things that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net and burn incense unto their drag, because by them their portion is fat. Shall they therefore empty their net and not spare continually to slay the nations?

V 12,13. Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die, O Lord, thou hast ordained them or judgment; and O Mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

Chapter 2

The first Chapter opens with apparent argument, how long etc.; The vision was given and is complete in itself; as a chapter:

1, “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, to receive his commands, that he may answer those who request, or argue with him re the Word of the Lord, or Oracle.

2. And the Lord answered me and said, Write the vision, carefully take down all that I say, make it plain upon tables, write it in full, a plain legible hand. That he may run that readeth it, it doesn’t mean, that the words are made so plain, hat a man running may read it. Hence as Psalm 49, “Open my dark saying...” The mystery hid in God. Ephesians 3:4,5. Also Christ’s Parables. Indicates that perusal with attention to the vision, or God’s Word, would make speed to save his life from the invasion of the Chaldeans.

3. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but the end it shall speak and not lie, though it tarry wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not delay. R.V.

4. Behold his soul which is lifted up (puffed up)’ is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith.

5. The Chaldean or Russian character is enlarged upon. “Yea also.” Transgresseth by wine (propaganda, communism), proud, ambitious, inebriated with his successes, abide not at home, extend borders, enlargeth desire as hell, as death, cannot be satisfied, gathereth nations heapeth peoples. This proverb “Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his.” How long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay?

7. Insurrection follows, strong drink, bite and sting. Proverbs 23:32. Booties unto them, oppressed and spoiled.

8 to 13. Covetousness, cutting off people, “Stone cry - Timber answer.” Literal and figurative, slave labour, mental control, nations weary themselves for very vanity (emptiness) by blood and unrighteousness, iniquity. A Divine contrast. Verse 14, For the earth shall be filled with the Glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

15. Woe? More drink and drunkenness, Thy bottle, propaganda, Chaldean or Russian brand, exposing their National nakedness and shame.

16. Now thou art drunken, shame for glory, shameful spewing, vomiting up that not his own. The cup of the Lord’s hand, also turned to thee. Revelation 18:6, latter day Chaldea, Russia, Ezekiel 39:4-5,

17. For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts which make them afraid, because of men’s blood, and for the violence of the land of the city, and all that dwell therein.

18 and 19. Idols. “What profit, what lies, what trust, Woe to the maker the root only. Graven, Molten, Dumb, no breath: awake, arise. The meanest brute is superior to them all .

Now silence

30. But the Lord is in his Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him.

Chapter 3

A prayer, set to Shigionoth, (according to variable songs or tunes)

There seems a break between the last verse of 2nd chapter (verse 20) and the 2nd verse of the 3rd chapter. “But the Lord is in his Holy Temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” This suggests the House of Prayer for all nations, Mark 11:17 - in Christ’s day a “den of thieves.”

2. “O Lord I have heard thy speech and was afraid;” Chap. 1. The work of the Chaldeans, and Chapter 2. Warning to escape invasion. In Ezekiel 10:18, The Glory of the Lord in departing from the Temple, in the Cherubic Chariot of Spirit; The Prayer: Revive thy work in the midst of the years, or as the years approach, in wrath remember mercy?

3. God’s future Power and Glory, manifested by the Past Manifestation of Glory on Sinai, Paran, whence the spies were sent to survey the land, Teman the South. The Thirty-one Kings see Joshua. 12:9-24, subdued by Israel, His Glory covereth the heavens, the Earth is full of his Praise (the expression truly of his people).

4. Light and Power with them his hand at work. The Powerful One hidden. Insufferable splendour The Glory on Sinai covered by Cloud six days. The Glory between Cherubim, hidden by cloud from Incense altar.

5. Before him the pestilence, burning coals at his feet, shown in Numbers 11:55. Buried those that lusted for flesh? The Spies. Numbers 14:37. The rebellion of Koran, Dathan and Abiram, and their sympathisers, fourteen thousand seven hundred by plague.

6. He stood and measured the Earth, surveyed the Land, drove asunder the Nations. Hittites etc, Everlasting Mountains (Granite) scattered, Perpetual Hills, (Bowed). AD and Olam connected with Mountains and Hills, so the Age of Ages are surveyed by Jahweh; Nations are divided however Strong, or established. They bow and are scattered, Making way for the Age-lasting, Olam, Millennium, and the Beyond. His ways are Everlasting. Psalm 139:23,24. David’s prayer “And lead me in the Way Everlasting.”

7. CHARAN in affliction, MIDIAN did tremble, the Arabs and mingled peoples, Israel’s enemies dealt with.

8. Riding Horses and Chariots of Salvation, the Clouds, the Winds, the Storm, the Frost, the Hail, Seas Divided to make a way, Rivers passed on, while waters stood, holding up their hands, while his people passed over, the Elements, the Mountains, Rivers and Seas all controlled from His Chariot of Power.

11, The Sun and Moon stood still in their habitation: the extra light gave them time to complete the discomfiture, caused by the hailstones. Joshua 4:14-15. “As the Captain of the Lord’s host am I come.” Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger, (tread them down).

13. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundest the head out of the house of the wicked (making naked), in cutting off their Firstborn. Selah?

14. They came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: “Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages.” The head of the troops, Pharaoh and his Generals?

15. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters. Walk no need to hurry. The Cloud; had slowed up the whirlwind, also their wheels were removed so they dragged heavily.

16. Seeking rest in the day of trouble, in sleep of death? The Spirit so far surveyed their history in panorama. The triumph over their enemies, and chastisement to Israel, therefore the hymn or song. But now what? Fear, dismay and sorrow, my lips quiver at the Voice; re their captivity and the barren land, once the land of milk and honey, invade, or cut them off with his troops.

17. Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meal; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls;

18. Truly (Shiginoth), variable songs; Songs of deliverance, of sorrow, confidence returning as shown in v.17, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Vary again:

19, The Jahweh Elohim is my strength and he will make my feet like hinds feet. (where man cannot tread) and he will make me to walk upon mine high places (Israel's restoration and worship. In the heights of Zion.

Shigionoth (according to variable songs or tunes) have now added Neginoth, to the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

Brother J. Hembling

Romans 7:14

"It is difficult to conceive how the opinion could have crept into the church, or prevailed there, that the apostle speaks here of his regenerate state; and that what was, in such a state, true of himself, must be true of all others in the same state. This opinion has, most pitifully and most shamefully not only lowered the standard of Christianity, but destroyed its influence and disgraced its character. It requires but little knowledge of the spirit of the Gospel, and of the scope of this Epistle, to see that the Apostle is here either personating a Jew, under the Law and with out the Gospel, or showing what his own state was... while without Christ."

Dr. A. Clarke

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Jude 24, 25
