

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 286

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Editorial

Dear Friends, Brothers and Sisters,

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth:" This promise of God in Isaiah 65:17 is what the world is waiting for; a time of peace with a righteous worldwide government. This is what Christians are expecting once this present time of trouble has passed. It is what we pray for – God's Kingdom will come and His will be done in all the earth as it is now done in heaven. Jesus Christ is the King who will reign for His Father and the time of His coming draws ever nearer.

There is plenty of evidence to show that we are now living in the last days for most of the Bible prophecies leading up to this great world-changing event have been fulfilled and the beginnings of God's judgements are already taking place in the world showing His displeasure at what the human race is doing to His creation which He designed for mankind good health and happiness; it showed His glory and it was meant for us to appreciate and enjoy. But not only are we wreaking havoc with this world but man's selfishness, suspicion and hate for each other and their rejection of God has gone beyond the bounds of all reason.

In the days of Noah God saw the evil of the people and in His anger He destroyed the inhabited part of the world with a flood after having told Noah to build an ark. "And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." (Genesis 7:1) and saved only Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives – just eight people and destroy the rest – millions of people and with Noah's family God made a fresh start in populating the world again.

God also made a promise that He would never again destroy the earth by means of a flood - a promise which He has kept. So when the earth's population increased again, many people again forsook God and in the course of time He chose faithful Abraham and his family, making of them the nation of Israel, promising that if they served Him faithfully they would be well rewarded. Jesus tells us of their history in a parable in Matthew 21:33 – 41 in which He compares the nation of Israel to a vineyard and His Father as "The Lord of the vineyard." Here is the story Jesus told, abbreviated for the sake of space, - "a certain householder planted a vineyard... and let it out to husbandmen... and he sent his servants... that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and

stoned another... last of all he sent 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... When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?"

Here we see Israel as God's vineyard which He let out to husbandmen, i.e. the leaders of the nation of Israel responsible for governing His people wisely, who were meant to teach the people God's laws and keep them faithfully, which they failed to do, and so God sent His servants, the prophets, in the hope of finding a goodly harvest but there was little there and worse, the husband men beat, or stoned, or killed those servants, the prophets. In the end God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, whom the husbandmen crucified. Throughout the two thousand years since then the Israelites (Jews) have suffered dreadfully as a nation and punished for their continued rejection of their Messiah. Now Israel is back in her own land and expecting their Messiah to come very soon but they don't know yet that Jesus Christ is their Messiah.

Just a few weeks ago a remarkable sixteen year old girl, Greta Thunberg, was invited to address various conventions and conferences and spoke very sensibly, openly and truthfully about the failure of world leaders to take reasonable measures to avoid the self-destruction of the human race. She was listened to by millions of people world-wide and applauded everywhere she went; everyone agreed she was right and matters must be taken in hand immediately or the inevitable will surely happen and she and everyone else wanted a future to which all could look forward.

But unfortunately there are those who think they can ignore these alarmist predictions and let the future take care of itself. Again there are those who cannot see where the vast amount of money needed will come from, or how they are likely to get the co-operation of people with such diverse opinions as to how best to tackle the immense problems they see. So what is the likely result of this girl's efforts and of so many others who see the sense of doing whatever they can to improve matters? Will she be heard, or will anyone take any notice? Time will tell, of course. Winston Churchill once said "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened." Will the same be said of this global problem?

Jesus foretold that "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved." And this is the problem many people see and feel so helpless and this will result in "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" again words of Jesus (Luke 21:26) but He goes on to say, "for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance draweth nigh."

I said a moment ago that the Jews "don't know yet that Jesus Christ is their Messiah" but when Jesus Christ does come they will realise their terrible mistake "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." (Zechariah 13:6). And we have perhaps the most telling prophecy in Zechariah chapter 12 but as this is a long quote I will give only some of the salient points: -

Verse 1. ...the LORD for Israel ..., which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. 2. Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, ... 3. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. 4. In that day, saith the LORD, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: ... and will smite every horse of the people with blindness. 5. And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God ... and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: ... 8. In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. 9. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

10. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. 11. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. 12. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; 13. The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; 14. All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.”

What more can we say of these certain events? Are we prepared for the coming troubles with all the problems that will attend these events? God has provided all that is needful for all who will turn to Him and through the Apostle Peter has promised “...and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Acts 2:21.

Will you be amongst them? The choice is yours and no one else’s.

With love to all, and blessings in Jesus’ Name. Russell.

A Radio Program on Original Sin

This was a radio programme which made an interesting examination of the doctrine of Original Sin and where it springs from. A Jew, a Christian and a Muslim took part. It was a concept rejected by the Jew and the Muslim and as also later emerged in the programme, by the Greek Orthodox Church.

The Muslim thought that the account of what happened in the Garden of Eden and to our first parents shewed how man became responsible for his own actions, and that it gives the basis for the origin of evil or error. The events make clear that humans are good as long as they obey God.

The Jew thought it shewed the emancipation of human beings, tossed out as they were, into reality and given responsibility for governing themselves. It was not a “fall” as seen by Christianity but an expulsion into adulthood and into maturity.

In the Hebrew Bible “naked” in the Genesis context means vulnerable, it is not necessarily an account of sexual awakening although one man thought it was and it is his view that has had so much to do with the Christian obsession with the doctrine of the “fall” or Original Sin as defined in the Church’s 39 Articles and the Christadelphian Statement of Faith, to name but two documents.

This man was Augustine, born in 354 in a North African town under Roman rule. He was educated in Italy and became a public orator in Milan. Eventually he converted to Catholic Christianity and became a bishop. Augustine was a prolific writer and he was the last and most important of the figures who are now called the Fathers of the Church. They are a small group of scholar theologians of the early centuries after the death of Christ who have shaped what Christians are supposed to believe. Nobody has had more influence on the subsequent history of the church than Augustine. He was the leading theologian in the Middle Ages. He was the great influence on Martin Luther and therefore the Protestant reformation. Calvin, too, owes a lot to Augustine. Augustine is the most quoted author in the 39 Articles of the Church of England and the most quoted in the Vatican Council of 1965. What an influence!

Before he converted to Catholicism Augustine was enamoured of a sect, with Persian origins, called the Manicheans. Mani, who was its prime mover, tussling with the problem of evil in a world created by a good God, decided that evil was to be found in matter. Our souls are good, he reasoned, for we are splinters of the divine, but we are trapped in evil matter by a body and in particular by its sexual lusts. Augustine was greatly influenced by this explanation. He had been promiscuous much of his youth and into his midlife and was ashamed of it. He was the person who introduced celibacy into the picture as a necessity for followers of Christ.

Some of the early fathers of the Church speak of women as intrinsically dangerous. This is not a particularly Christian view, it is one found in ancient Greek sources. At the time of the early church the whole culture was Greek, the language, social style, history, stories and education. This accounts for the dubious attitude to women that lingers still in many churches to the present day. The early fathers of the church reasoned that if they were attracted by women, it was the women's fault and not theirs. Certainly it could not be the fault of men, who are rational beings. This is the story that is read into Adam and Eve's activities and its logic does not entirely recommend it!

So Original Sin was launched into Western Christendom as a genetic condition, inherited at birth, which makes us incapable of doing the right thing no matter how hard we try. Augustine's view mystifies other faiths also inspired by the Garden of Eden account. The Rabbi in the programme said; "It is totally alien if you look at the Biblical account. The ground is cursed because of Adam for as long as he lives, that curse stops when Adam dies. Because the first person born after Adam's death is Noah, whose name is given to him because he is comforted, because the curse is finished. So any attempts to make Adam and Eve the perpetual scapegoats and humanity the perpetual sufferers for what they did, goes against Biblical reckoning and Jewish reckoning.

The Muslim expressed the opinion that "The concept of original sin is quite alien to Islam. Islam believes in the individual responsibility; you are born sinless. Islam recognizes human weakness, everyone is capable of sinning but as an individual not as having inherited a sin.

At this time Christianity had superseded Judaism and Islam had not yet arrived and Augustine became more bitter and entrenched in his views. He was judgmental of others as he got older. He became more polemical and less tolerant of other views. He was quite unforgiving to those he felt held wrong views for he thought they would undermine the faith, in this case the Catholic faith.

In 410 Rome was sacked and refugees flooded into North Africa. One of these refugees was Pelagius, a Welsh monk and his band of followers. Like Augustine as a young man, they believed free will was all and that we can do bad things as well as good. Pelagius didn't believe Adam's sin had corrupted human nature, it was more that Adam was a bad example. What arrogance! said Augustine, what lack of humility to suppose that people could and indeed should perfect themselves, without God's grace.

Pelagius fled to Palestine and there he produced a pamphlet stating his views and by- passing Augustine, circulated it widely. Augustine hit back by convening a Church Council of 80 powerful people who found in his favour. So Augustine sent a message to Rome to the Emperor asking for a statement of policy for support. The matter was clearly now political. The Pope who liked the idea of deciding what was or was not correct opinion, this was not yet the norm for Popes, decided that the accusations against Pelagius weren't justified, that original sin was not an issue of faith and so Pelagius was let off the hook. But then the Emperor intervened and said "no, we are the people who in collaboration with the African church know what orthodoxy is. The Pelagians minimize death. Who can deny that Adam must have "fallen" because death is such a terrible sadness to the human race." It is this argument that makes the Pope reverse his decision and declare Pelagius heretical, so he sent letters to all the bishops in the West describing Pelagius's view, which had previously been one opinion among many, as an opinion which should not be held. This is one of the first times in the West that we have a definition of what a heresy is.

Augustine had triumphed. But then another vigorous Pelagian took up the cudgels of the ideology, Julian of Eclanum. He was a fiery and energetic young man, whereas Augustine was by this time ageing and tired and not very well. Julian did not believe in original sin which he said was "improbable, untrue, and unjust." Augustine replied that man's idea of justice was not God's. Julian countered with, "...lumbering new born infants with sin at the moment of their birth was offensive," and he continued, "...tiny babies are not weighed down by their own sins but are being burdened with the sin of another. Tell me then, who is the person who inflicts punishment on innocent creatures? You answer God. God you say, God who commended His love to us, who has loved us, who has not spared his own Son for us. He it is you say who judges in this way. He is the persecutor of new born children. It would be right and proper to treat you as beneath argument. You have come so far from religious feeling, from civilized

thinking, so far indeed from mere common sense in that you think your God is capable of committing a crime against justice that is hardly conceivable even amongst barbarians.”

Julian went on tearing into Augustine with more pungent words, “...your evidence for this absurdity is laughable, for you imagine so great a power in such a sin that not only can it blot out the new born innocence of nature, but forever afterwards it will force man throughout his life into every form of viciousness, and what is as disgusting as it is blasphemous, is that this view of yours fastens as its most conclusive proof on the common decency by which we cover our genitals.”

Eventually Julian moved East to make his life with the Greek Orthodox Church who do not embrace the doctrine of Original Sin.

These words and controversies echo down the centuries to our own times. The arguments about the validity or not of the notion of original sin still rages on simply because people will not return to the Bible and to first principles and examine them with open minds, preferring instead to stick with doctrines that have been promulgated by fallible human beings. Human beings with political and power motivated agendas. The false doctrine of original sin and its following irrationality, that natural death is the wages of sin, are as misguided and unscriptural today and as insulting to God and to reason as they were in Augustine’s time. It has been well said that people who do not learn from history remain forever childish.

With love to all, Helen Brady.

Brother John Stevenson writes:

It is sometimes said that “If we are wrong it is because we want to be wrong.” I think it is very relevant to understanding why the Nazarene Fellowship are so few in number. We believe that God requires us to use our intelligence to know good and evil, or truth and error, and it is refreshing to know that each of us is willing to listen to any serious argument against our beliefs. But the vast majority of the public are not like that. Here is a quote from Ernest Brady in 1955 from “Too True To Be New”: –

“I do not think there is or ever has been a sect able to put forward a clear explanation of the atonement, for the reason that all alike go wrong at the very first step, in believing that natural death or corruptibility is the penalty of the sin in Eden. As I sat and listened to Brother Jennings in the Midlands Institute and saw a hall full of people being fed stones instead of bread, I can only confess that I felt sick at heart, and sad that I had been able to accomplish so little to enlighten them.”

There have been many such frustrating occasions in the long history of the Nazarene Fellowship, but we should not be too disheartened because we should remember that knowing good and evil, or truth and error is not important to most people and their attitude is, “If I am wrong, it is because I prefer to be wrong.” Here is another quotation - from Isaac Asimov, who was unfortunately an atheist, but was antipathetic to popular stupidity,

“Astrology is more popular today than ever before in history and more people than ever make a good living out of it. I have read that there are five thousand astrologers in the United States, and over ten million true believers... College students are no more a homogenous group than is any other large classification of humanity. Not all of them are interested in science; not all of them are truly bright; many of them are just bright enough to discover that what counts in this phoney world is merely the ability to sound bright – an ability which has carried many men to high political office... Many college students are taking up astrology in a big way because 1) it is the in thing to do, 2) it gives them a delicious, if false, sense of security, and 3) it gives them a passport to phoney intellectualism. And none of that is at all inconsistent with astrology being tripe.”

Astrology is far from being the only sort of tripe believed in. Religious sects are notorious for preferring tripe to truth, with man-made creeds and arrogant authoritarianism. But Jesus loves us all, prayed for us, wept for us and died for us. We must accept failure and disillusionment as inevitable in our witness, but hope and pray that some people will see and respond to the light that Jesus brought into the world.

Brother John Stevenson.

A Few Thoughts Regarding “Free Life”

When we talk of Jesus Christ having a Free Life we mean He was free from the condemnation which came into the world by Adam's transgression, which condemnation passed upon all Adam's posterity. The condemnation was that Adam's life was forfeited when he sinned and he was due to receive the penalty of being put to death for his sin. Adam never received his punishment but God showed him mercy and spared him so that the human race could follow. However, it was this forfeited life which was passed down to his sons and daughters and so to all generations to follow.

Adam was created and his Brother, Jesus Christ, was begotten by their Father with a life free from condemnation. It is commonly accepted that Adam's life was not under condemnation until he transgressed but with regard to Jesus' life we say the true reason for the Virgin Birth was to give Him a life also free of condemnation for His life came direct from His Father as did Adam's.

To be on probation for eternal life Adam had to be under law. Law gave him the choice of doing what was right or what was wrong. Adam lost his birthright when he made the wrong choice and ate of the forbidden tree. This necessitated the birth of Jesus Christ who kept His birthright safely by doing His father's will perfectly.

If these facts were accepted there would be no problem but some people deny them and so we have to produce more scripture teaching in order to provide support for our reasoning.

So now let us consider Moses as a type of Christ. There are many parallels but notice specially Moses “free life.” Around the time of Moses birth other male infants were slain by order of the authorities to prevent an uprising against their own interests. Moses was born into a family in bondage to Egyptian slavery. In his early days of infancy he was nourished by his mother who was in bondage, but, through God's intervention, he was brought up free of this bondage in the king's palace and educated and trained for a position in the royal household. Moses never forsook his kinsmen to pursue his interests in the royal household. Indeed he believed that his own people would see him as their champion when he slew the Egyptian. But that was not God's way any more than it would have been for Jesus Christ to have thrown Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple in order to persuaded the people to follow Him because of His great power and authority.

In due time God worked miracles by Moses - even Pharaoh had to accept that Moses was the leader of Israel. Moses led the people out of bondage and gave them a law from God. Obedience to the law would bring great reward while disobedience would bring dire consequences. He led the people through the wilderness years as far as the land of Promise.

In all these things we see Moses as a type of Christ but the point to notice in our present context is that God chose a free man for the purpose of delivering His people. Why? What was the reason for this when God could have raised up any one to lead His people out of bondage. We say, not so, because everyone else in Israel was in bondage. They were slaves to the Egyptians just as Adam and his descendants were slaves in bondage to Sin. No one in bondage would have fulfilled the type except for Moses who had been made free through Divine providence; God raised up a “free” Moses for His purpose of leading His people Israel out of bondage. Even as He chose a “free” Christ to lead His people out of the bondage to Sin. These facts we deduce from Scripture and find no Scripture contrary to them.

Robert Roberts view of “Free Life.”

But Robert Roberts says that “Free Life is a myth.” Here are his words quoted from “The Slain Lamb;” - early on in his lecture he says:-

“I will tonight, place the theory of the truth side by side with the theory of this error, and I will explain the theory of the truth in the language of the Spirit; and I will shew wherein the language of the Spirit is destructive of the language - the artificial and carnal language - which this Renunciationist heresy is incessantly compelled to employ in defining its principles.”

Later on, not yet having “placed the theory of the truth side by side with the theory of this error,” he continues,

“in order that you may see that Jesus, in the days of His flesh, inherited and experienced all the results and feelings that have come by Adam's transgression: from which I will argue and prove otherwise my argument, that this inheritance extended to mortality itself, and that “free life,” so called, is a myth... I wish to establish, link by link, all my evidence, as I will undertake to destroy, link by link, the whole chain of sophistry by the which the minds of the brethren are being bewitched and turned aside from the truth.”

Again, further on, we are still waiting for him to “establish link by link all my evidence,” he says,

“I will shew you before I am done, that He had not a free life, but bore our condemnation in his own person, as much as any of us, necessitating His death before He could be purified from the curse. This free life is a thing you do not read of in the Scriptures; it is a mere invention; a plausible thing, but a gratuitous thing; an unproved assumption which is made the starting point of the train of reasoning by which it is attempted to establish this heresy.”

And yet again, now half way through his lecture, not having shown us anything, but still boasting “I will shew you before I am done, that Jesus had not a free life, he says,

“I will endeavour to make manifest the most unscriptural, the most carnal, and the most untrue and mischievous character of the new philosophy, with which it is now attempted to inoculate the brethren on the subject of “the flesh”.

And so eventually and at last after an arduous period of preparation we come to the time when Robert Roberts is about to place before us “the theory of the truth in the language of the Spirit” and “prove that free life, so called, is a myth” and “to establish link by link” all his evidence to “shew Jesus had not a free life,” - and so we greatly anticipate the deliverance of some awesome argument with great expectation, and now the time of ‘birth’ surely has arrived - but what do we see? - we witness a ‘still-born’ argument, useless and lifeless as could be, for his conclusion is:~

“Well, if there had been a Jew who had kept the law in all things, having done the will of the Father from the very beginning of life to the end of his life, he would have been in the very position of the Lord Jesus Himself; it would then have been in his power, by dying, to cleanse himself from the Adamic condemnation, and his righteousness would have caused his resurrection from the dead. It is by the righteousness of one that resurrection has come (Romans 5:18, 1 Corinthians 15:21); it is not by the “free life” of one. “Free Life” is a myth; and invention of the new heresy...”

Well, Robert Roberts has shown us the concept of a novice, not having properly considered his subject. We surely ought to expect better from one of the Founding Fathers and a Pioneer of the Christadelphian Denomination. Where in his appeal to Scripture do we find any support for his views, let alone unassailable proof of them? Nowhere. Even Moses could not have saved anyone from their bondage to sin though free of the slavery of his family. Only Jesus could lay down His life voluntarily as a ransom for the faithful.

The previous evening Edward Turney, in his lecture “The Sacrifice of Christ,” had said,

“Now brethren, there are two things required of the last Adam (Jesus); one was that He should run His probation after a perfect manner; the other that He should lay down His life for us. I am utterly unable to see how He could lay down a life He did not possess. If His is lost or forfeit as ours is at birth He did not possess it free, and as His natural life was the price to be paid He had in that case nothing to pay with.”

We consider this subject is of the greatest importance to every disciple because, as Ernest Brady explained in his booklet “The Great Mystery of the Christian Religion,” –

“Those who have sought to explain Christ’s death as a vicarious punishment or as the destruction of a sinful nature have done both Him and His Father a grievous wrong. Him because if His death was in any sense necessary for His own deliverance it could not have been a sacrifice on behalf of others, and God because it would be totally unjust to punish the innocent in order that the guilty might go free.”

Brother Russell Gregory

I love this next piece. Over the past thirty years I think I have published it twice before but it is really worth publishing again. Helen was nineteen or twenty years of age and attended a Youth Fellowship at a nearby Church. – Russell.

* * *

Helen’s first encounter with a Church Minister

20th May 1956.

Dear Brethren and Sisters,

I belong to a Youth Fellowship connected with a Church, and recently a new Vicar had been installed. He has been coming to our Youth meetings and asking us to help him canvas the housing estates, springing up all around our homes, to ask the people to come to Church.

When discussing those ideas recently, it was not long before questions of Church doctrine were raised. I had asked why it was taught we had immortal souls that went to heaven when we died, when there is no Scriptural basis for this teaching. I explained as best I could that I believed, death was a sleep and the grave a resting place, and that being raised, if found worthy, by Christ at the resurrection would be our next and only conscious action.

The Vicar replied that he, too, believed in the second coming of Christ, but that he did not see what difference it made to our going to heaven, as the people who died between now and then had got to go somewhere. I asked why they could not just stay in the grave - he said if I wanted to believe that I stayed in the grave I could, and those that believed in heaven-going could believe that; in fact, whichever idea appealed to us and we believed so would it happen to us, and in any case it was immaterial as long as we were brought back from where ever we were when Christ appeared, again.

This all seemed very peculiar and muddled to me, but as he did not seem to mind where he was going, and I knew where I was, there did not seem much point in pursuing the subject.

Later in the evening the Vicar called Christ divine - so I asked him if he thought Christ was the same as us: he said, “no, certainly not” - He was God’s Son and had special powers. I asked if he did not think we, too, could draw on those special powers if we prayed perfectly and sincerely? He replied that we could, but because we are only human we are incapable of perfection.

I then asked him, in what way Christ was different from us? He said, "He was God;" I said, if He was God, He must have been praying to Himself when He prayed that the cup might pass from Him in the garden of Gethsemane; he said then, He was only a part of God; but when I asked if he meant part of God in the same way that we are he did not answer. But he asked me if I thought I could really do no wrong, as Christ did; I said, yes - we all could if we tried hard enough. He wanted to know; then why somebody had not succeeded in doing that up to now? I replied, I thought some people had done - but how should we be sure; only God knows those sort of things. He said I was the first person he had met who said those things and that he wished me luck, but I should soon discover as I went through life that I could not help doing wrong, as it all started with original sin which he expected I knew nothing about. I rather surprised him by saying I did know a bit about it, but that I did not believe in it. He maintained whether I did or not, something happened in the Garden of Eden to Adam which has altered us all. I asked where in the Bible such a thing is explained - he said it was not, but we were full of sin and that was the reason.

I asked him then if he thought the world was full of wicked people who could never be any better however hard they tried, with Christ as a pattern that could never be copied; he said that was about it; I then said it was a very odd and unfair situation - and everyone agreed with me.

He would not say any more, but told me that even if I shut myself away from everything and everybody I should not be able to help evil thoughts coming into my mind - and that was the result of original sin; which I could not help however much I might try. I replied, if that was sin Christ was a sinner, too, as we are told He was tempted in all points as we are. In the wilderness the devil tempted Him to make the world His footstool, and turn the stones to bread - how else could those temptations be like ours if they were not evil thoughts?

He did not answer, as he thought no useful purpose could be served by arguing about these things, as none of them mattered anyway - it was all hair-splitting and pointless.

However, it served, one excellent purpose - to make me feel how real was the belief and the Truth I had been baptised into and what a clear and logical doctrine I had grasped: a doctrine with a truly wonderful message and theme, one that that I was able to match up with so little skill and knowledge to a qualified clergyman, a point of view and emerge so well.

It was my first real encounter of this sort; I hope I have set it down to interest you a little,

With Love to all, Helen Brady.

Exhortation

Dear Brethren and Sisters, Greetings in Jesus' Name.

The Apostle Paul declares, "I am not ashamed, of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written. The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16,17). In this regard no law of God is more absolute than "He that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Matthew 7:7, Luke 11:9).

Those among us who have been taught to prize the Word of God and the truth it contains, should pray earnestly and implore the Most High, through Jesus, for a new heart and the right spirit which will seek those true riches by means of which "we might become partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

It is in this direction, as in no other, which enables man to seek pardon for his sins through the blood of Christ, "according as His Divine power hath given unto us all things pertaining to life, and godliness through the knowledge of Him that hath called us unto glory and virtue." (2 Peter 1:3).

Especially ought we to note that these exceeding great and precious promises are given to us dependant of one thing: that is, knowledge of Him. This is of paramount importance as we shall see if we read 1 Corinthians 13:2. Paul here testifies that “without such knowledge man would be nothing,” which in the language of the Psalmist means, “a man that is in honour and understandeth not, is like the beast that perishes” (49:20).

This is indeed a strong expression, nonetheless. Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding are the things needful which enable men to seek salvation from man’s great adversary - death. Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding are the requisitions necessary for the exertions to be in Christ. They constitute the incentive by which man will produce in himself as much of Christ’s love as possible, and not as much as he hopes he will get away with.

But albeit, the greatest evil prevalent in this world today is the evil of the abuse of understanding; an evil that is as old as the hills. We read: “In the beginning God...” But alas, almost with his creation man asserts himself, and lo, the evil of the abuse of understanding is the evil thereof. Such evil was fostered and nourished to a degree that it flourishes above all else, and grieved God in His heart, and repented that He had made man. “Thus God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them, and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” (Genesis 6).

Despite this destruction, however, the widespread perversion of the will of God that existed before the flood was again soon in evidence. Here, the abuse of understanding induced Jonah to attempt an escape from the presence of God, and which deceived his sea-faring companions to “each cry unto his own God” (Jonah 1), exactly as if a piece of wood or metal could guard them from evil and danger. Similarly, the heathen aboard the ship in which Paul sailed from Malta to Syracuse worshipped Castor and Pollux (Acts 28:11). These were two idols into whose care the ship was committed, and were to the heathen what the living God was to Paul.

Athens is famous for its art and literature, but Paul bore testimony against the Athenians in the very city. “I beheld an altar with this inscription. To the Unknown God whom therefore ye ignorantly worship” (Acts 17:23). It is much the same today, perhaps not precisely an idol of wood or stone, nor yet an altar suitably inscribed, but many do worship a God that they know little or nothing about, and which is an evil more destructive than a deliberate sin. Colleges are erected in which the tutors cleave to the arm of flesh for spiritual guidance, the intricacies of which enable them to pervert the very meaning of the Word of God and the Sacrifice of Christ. Their teaching distorts Biblical facts, and channels people’s minds into belief of things not commanded in the Bible, which they pretend were spoken and taught by holy men of old. They go to their Bibles to prove what they think and not to learn what they haven’t thought out. Graduates are honoured and diplomatised for the proficiency in the art of human contrivance of wisdom. Rational non-churchgoing men are driven to abstain from religion and to look upon God, and logically, as a reluctant old tyrant, for they cannot understand how the Graciousness of an ever merciful God falls below their own standard of ethics.

This obviously must be the case if it be true that natural death is the legacy of the Adamic sin, and true it will remain as long as a man continues to transform the truth of God into fantastic tales, and we are required to accept it as truth.

The initial error lies in the fact that a word, which has no reference to the natural man in Scripture, is inserted in a verse where it ought not to be. We speak of the creation of man. Here God relates the fact that “He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7).

The verse does not say “everlasting soul” - it merely says “living soul.” Emanating from this initial abuse of understanding is the widespread perversion at the truth of God, and which assumes authority far above the written Word of God. Its destruction is paramount in the diminishing importance of the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and the supposed insatiable desire of God to seek vengeance.

Oh, let this not be the case with us; let us turn to our Bibles and read things as necessary to God’s point of view and not as being necessary to our point of view; let us be convinced that God is more ready and more willing to impart us with knowledge, wisdom and understanding than we are to seek it.

The fundamental requirement of God is understanding, for it embraces all that is required of man which enables him to acknowledge God's wisdom and purpose with the creation of man, our relation to Him, and the teaching concerning Christ. It is only by understanding Christ's love towards us are we able to respond with a love for Christ, for to be ignorant of the things concerning Christ is to be ignorant of Salvation.

In the New Testament, as in Romans 13:14, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 4:24, and Colossians 3:10, the Apostle Paul speaks of believers in Christ having put on the "new man," and still more plainly, as in Romans 8, of the change effected in the believer. He there shows the obligation upon all who are made partakers of Salvation through Christ to forsake their evil ways and to live according to the spirit of Christ - always doing and submitting to the will of the Father.

My friends, to do this we must beware lest we be satisfied to let the Word of God be covered and obscured by the evil of the abuse of understanding; it is an evil imagination which cleaves to the hearts of men who will not permit God to put His truth into their minds. Let us pray earnestly that this may not be the case with us, "for dreadful is the state of those in whom sin is graven on the tables of their heart." (Jeremiah 17:1).

God will put His truths into our minds, enabling us to do His will in all things if we obey His commandment to "keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23.

It is by knowledge, wisdom and understanding are we able to avoid despising the Word of God and to listen to His precepts and threatenings and accept the promise of mercy and the declaration of the love of God towards us. We need not be abusive of understanding if we have the earnest desire to learn His Word and enthusiastically respond with true love for the love given to us on the Cross.

Wisdom, knowledge and understanding is available to all who diligently seek the truth of God. We read, "the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Psalm 19:7, "the Lord preserveth the simple." Psalm 116:6, "the entrance of thy "Word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple." Psalm 119:130.

Yes, the Bible was written to make men wise unto salvation, and clearly set forth so that a plain simple man may understand the evil of sin and the Truth of the Gospel. Especially ought we to remember that Jesus chose twelve men who were plain fishermen, or much the same class, to preach the Word of God to the world (Matthew 4:18,21, Mark 1:19). This must be the strongest proof that can be of the Divine origin of the Word of God and that its prevalence is not due to human contrivance of wisdom. Truly is the law of God more absolute in "he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" than any other.

We shall be foolish, to doubt it.

Brother B. D. Lewis.

Jesus said...

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father will ye do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." John 8:44.

We know that the devil is a personification of man's will when opposed to God's; and Revelation 12:9 tells us the devil is "that old serpent... which deceiveth the whole world," and by putting the word "serpent" in place of "devil" in the above saying of Jesus we see He is referring to the temptation in Eden.

When Jesus said the devil “was a murderer from the beginning” He was not referring to Cain who slew Able, as is commonly thought; if that were the case Jesus would have used the Greek word “*phoneus*,” which is “homicide,” but He used the word “*anthropoktonos*,” which is “man-slayer.” In Romans 7:44 Paul wrote, “For sin, taking occasion by commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.” The Greek word for “slew” is “*apokteino*” and is of the same derivation as the word used by Jesus when He expressed similar reasoning-in John 8:44.

Eve challenged God's authority and convinced herself she wouldn't die and that she, too, could be wise. There was nothing wrong with her desires - it is our hope also - but it was her attempt to do things her own way, her action based upon selfish and wrong reasoning which slew her in law; not the reasoning nor the temptation itself, but the action which followed - the eating of the tree which she had been told she must not touch “lest ye die.” Judicial death was now the sentence she awaited.

Genesis 1:31 tells us that all God made was very good, whereas in Genesis 3:1 we read that the serpent was more subtle, or crafty than any beast which the Lord made; so who then, did make the serpent? The answer is man. When God created Adam and Eve He gave them choice - to do either God's will and live, or to do their own and die. When they chose to do their own will in opposition to God's they “made” or became the creature which was not of God's making. We say not of God's making for we are told that “God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

Why was the curse upon the serpent given separately from the curses upon Adam and Eve? Because in sparing the human race there were to be two groups of people; those who accepted God's covenants and those who would not. To those outside God's covenants it was a matter of “Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life;” for that is all the food they will ever have - food from the dust of the ground, “for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.” Genesis 3:19. All who have only this food to eat cannot live beyond this present natural life.

For those in covenant with God, they “shall not live by bread alone (not food from the dust of the ground only), but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God (spiritual food). Matthew 4:4. So it is that in the mercy and love of God He made it possible for those who repent and seek to do His will, to have life “more abundantly,” that is, life eternal.

Brother Russell Gregory

An Open Letter

I was about thirty years of age when I first came to realise the simple and beautiful truth about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The truth dawned on me as I read the booklet by the late Brother Ernest Brady “Too True to be New.” Since that time the subject has been very often in my thoughts and I must say that it has profoundly affected my life and outlook.

The substitutionary explanation of the Atonement is obviously true - when we come to realise that it is purely conjectural to think that the disobedience of Adam and Eve changed their natures - when we see that their relationship to God changed.

A lot of misunderstanding has arisen over this matter, not only between the Nazarene Fellowship and Christadelphians, but down the centuries among the Protestant Churches. The Catholics, however, share the Christadelphian view, i.e. the Representative Theory.

Nowhere in Genesis does it say that Adam's nature was changed. In the indictment by God however, Adam was reminded of salient facts about himself and Eve – his mortality from his creation and that until his ultimate return to the ground, his life would no longer be easy, and that Eve would know pain in childbirth. Nowhere does the record state “a bias for evil” was then implanted within them. The threat of

death in the event of disobedience was not carried out, but the animal which was sacrificed, did lose its life and Adam and Eve were temporarily covered by and with its skin. Adam clearly was disciplined in part for his disobedience, but not with his life. Indeed he lived a long, long time after all this and became the father of all living. There was a breakdown in relationship between Adam and Eve and God, but pair were spared by God, or the human race would have ended there and then.

The penalty (wages) of sin is death (oblivion), but the gift of God is eternal life, now, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and the last enemy to be destroyed is physical death. It is not sin to exist. It is sin to break God's laws.

The price of Adam's sin had to be paid ultimately, and Jesus brought to the cross two main qualifications - He was not the Son of Adam, but the Son of God, and, as Son of Mary He kept the law perfectly. Indeed, He was born of a woman under the law, which law He kept perfectly. It was therefore not human nature He condemned in His sacrificial death on the cross, but sin, wherever and whenever it held sway.

If we refuse to accept this and prefer to believe that the Lamb of God, prepared from the foundation of the world, was in fact as condemned as those He came to save, that is up to us, and when we stand before Him we can tell Him so at our peril. Would we really dare to say "Oh yes Lord, I did this and that, but You remember I could not help it."? The "Divine Court" may resound with laughter, because the fact is, it is not our "natures" that let us down, it is our characters. We are nevertheless, not perfect but if we confess our sins to the Throne of Grace He is faithful to forgive us for Christ's sake, who died a Ransom for many,

Sincerely your brother, Harold Dawson.

Among some papers of our late bro. Fred Pearce is an address given "by another of our sleeping brethren, F.C.Maycock in March 1938, just before World War II. It would appear the thoughts expressed were as the result of a careful reading of Isaiah chapter 2.

The Bible and World Peace

This year (1938), as you doubtless know marks the fourth centenary of placing a copy of the English Bible in every Parish Church throughout the land.

We, today, thank God from our hearts that we can, without fear of molestation, gather round its sacred pages to speak to one another of the Peace that is promised - that is sure and certain, as the day follows night, despite the fact that we live in a world spending thousands of millions on weapons of war every year. The opening verses of the chapter in Isaiah speak of a time when men shall "beat their swords into plowshares. It is a promise from the Lord God of Heaven, and one day it will become a matter of actual experience. In this prophecy we learn:-

- 1 of the people through whom this world peace will come.
- 2 the period when we may expect to see its accomplishment.
- 3 the place from whence this Divine Law is to come forth.
- 4 the Divine Person who will carry it to its beautiful consummation.
- 5 of the glorious effect which will result therefrom.

Do not imagine it is all a Utopian dream. It is not the purpose of God that the world is always to be a place of sin, misery, war, desolation and death. He has declared that the earth shall be filled with His glory. God has given us the opportunity to seek for, and obtain, a part in that purpose, if we will but come to Him in the ways of His appointing. What an inestimable honour and privilege it is that men should be permitted to hearken to Divine counsels - to "listen in" to what God has made known in His Word. Man

can do himself no greater honour than in all humility, and in the spirit of earnest prayer, study to know what God has promised to do and the more so as we see the day approaching.

“Say hath the night of sorrow reigned,
The dawn shall bring us light;
God shall appear, and we shall rise,
With gladness in His sight”.

Where do we stand in the stream of time is always an interesting and faith absorbing topic of those who are daily watching and waiting. This scripture reading has been recorded twice - first in Isaiah, and second by the prophet Micah (4:4), who also makes some very important additions. No doubt both Isaiah and Micah were deeply impressed by the glorious prospect of universal peace and prosperity in which their own nation of Israel was destined to take such a prominent part. It has been said concerning Israel that their golden age is always in the future – and that witness is true. Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome have had their day - but the oldest, and in every way the most remarkable of all nations, still looks forward to a future that will surpass anything yet experienced.

It is this hope that springs eternal; it is a hope based upon the promises made to a father of Israel, that is the reason why that despite all the persecution that they have gone through, a just punishment - albeit scattered and peeled, they remain as God's witnesses throughout the length and breadth of the earth. Judgment and mercy are strangely wrought in His dealings with this wonderful people, and every word of God in prophetic utterance is sure, for here we are dealing with foundation facts. God has a “set time” and “time appointed” for the restoration of His people as the Psalmist declares in Psalm 102:13-16.

Centuries may pass, but that is no argument in favour of the failure of His promises. Four thousand years were allowed to pass before the promise made to our first parents, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head was fulfilled; but in the fullness of time God sent forth His son, made of a woman, and the miracle of Bethlehem was the Divine answer to the promise in Eden. Many other incidents could be recalled and joined to show that God is never behindhand in His promises, nor slack as men count slackness - and so in strict harmony with His other dealings, He declares through His two servants that the period we have come to know as the “Times of the Gentiles” will terminate in due course.

It was thus prophesied while as yet they had not even begun to run, for the Golden Head of the image - Nebuchadnezzar had not yet appeared. It is well to remember that in Scripture there is a distinction to be drawn between 'people' and 'peoples,' or the Jews and other nations of mankind. The word 'nation' refers to Israel, while the word in the plural indicated the Gentile races.

So in the prophecy in Isaiah the purpose of bringing Peace centres round Judah and the house of Jacob. Their history is most dramatic, a history of calamities. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2). Scattered and peeled, uprooted and trodden down, in hopeless captivity, serving foreign masters in bondage worse than slavery, sold as cattle in the market-place – they are still to fill the cup of their national apostasy, for their treatment of their Messiah when He came to His own and they received Him not. Known throughout the ages as the tribe of the weary foot, they remain an outstanding witness to the wrath of God and the truthfulness of His word. Yet the covenants stand firm: there is to be a complete reversal – they will be the head, not the tail, of the nations. They have been in the furnace of trial heated sevenfold - yet they survive. The promise made to Abraham has not been forgotten nor abrogated, but will yet be fulfilled in all its glory and literality. Read the letter to the Romans- chapter nine in particular - you have it on record of the character of this marvellous people. Their re-gathering will be as life from the dead - the promises of restoration with open eyes and penitent heart they turn to Him acknowledging their sin. Then shall the 67th Psalm be fulfilled. Peace truly - “based upon the righteous government that shall “be shared to the remotest parts of the earth. The prophecy then not only tells us the people through whom these wonderful things are to be accomplished, but it tells us the time - “in the last days.” Jeremiah and Ezekiel both speak in scriptural language of the glorious day - a people brought back from the sword, gathered out of many people, dwelling at last in peace and safety, in the latter days when God is sanctified in their midst. When the Lord Jesus Christ came the first time the Roman world was in a state of universal sickness, and cried

out for a Healer. When He comes the second time, the world is to be characterised by distress of nations, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth (Luke 21),

The period between these two events is marked by a series of wars, pestilence, and war preparations. That, in the main, has been the history of the past 2000 years, and the more we study the events the more we are drawn to the conclusion that today we live at the end of the Gentile rule and authority, with the near approach of the joyful day so long ago proclaimed by the prophets of old.

Returning to our opening chapter in Isaiah our third point is before us - the place from where will go forth the law that brings Peace and Prosperity. JERUSALEM in the midst of the earth - beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion. Jerusalem has been chosen by God for the high purpose it is to achieve as the centre of all blessedness to all mankind, Psalm 48:1-5. Prosperity unheard of is yet to spring up in that land promised to Abraham and his seed. Jerusalem shall yet prove the touchstone of all nations, and shall become a burdensome stone to all people, for though all nations be gathered against it, their designs for its overthrow will fail. Taken together, the Jew and the Land form an unmistakable sign whereby we may know that we live in the days of the near approach of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ - He who alone can speak Peace to the nations. Remember the Fig Tree parable of our Lord: "When these things begin to come to pass then, lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh." To all those who are waiting and watching in the way of God, commandments, come the assurance that "all things are working for good to them who are called to His Kingdom and glory."

Amidst the gathering storm clouds - such may be privileged to hear His voice, yea He has promised that He will not leave them - so we say it may well be that those words will be heard again. "It is I, be not afraid." We turn again to Isaiah where WG see that it is the Lord Himself that comes to take the world in hand. There is a gradual unfolding: from Jerusalem as the centre and Jacob as an individual, to the national and then the universal. The 72nd Psalm extols the wonderful picture of a Divine Kingdom on the earth, bringing joy, peace, and good-will to all men. As a King He will rule with equity to earth's remotest end. His government will "be carried out in perfect righteousness, justice, love and power, and "become perfect in every detail, it must endure as long as the sun and moon to all generations. Turn to chapters 9,11 and 12 of Isaiah; there you will find definite statements concerning this King who will reign in righteousness, the effect of which is PEACE, QUIETNESS, and ASSURANCE for ever (three beautiful conditions, so absent in the world today).

The interval that separates us from this happy time will be filled with events so graphically foretold by the Lord Himself and recorded in Luke 21:10-11. To Daniel 500 years earlier, it was revealed as a time of trouble such as was never since there was a nation. It was to coincide with the deliverance of the Jews, and more startling still, with the resurrection of the dead. World events are rushing to this climax. It will be a time of God's vengeance on those who "obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." But it will usher in the time of PEACE and GOODWILL to those who have obeyed. To all who have been faithful in the days of their probation, it will mean the glorious gift of immortality - it matters not if such have been asleep thousands of years; they will come forth to be changed, in the twinkling of an eye. I Corinthians 15:51-52. They then will be invited to enter into His joy of ruling the world in righteousness, that all nations may be blessed.

These stirring events, centred as they are in Palestine, will startle the world, "kings will be dumfounded." "For that which had not been, told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider." - Isaiah 52:19. Why? See v. 1,7,9. In the Psalms we read, "The nations rage and the people imagine vain things." All opposition will be useless. God has decreed - now He purposes. "What though all the world resist Him, God will realise His plan." The kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 1:15). Words of ours are but poor vehicles to convey adequately all the blessings which will obtain in the kingdom of God. But turn to Psalm 67, short, but how beautiful - the earth no longer cursed will yield an abundance for all. Christ alone is able to speak peace to the world, but before that must come the humbling of the pride of man. Read also Haggai chapter 2. We are now better able to appreciate Isaiah 2:2 and 4. So peace and the time of goodwill is coming, and we note that it is in connection with Judah and Jerusalem - not with Moscow, London, Berlin, New York or Rome - Christ returns King of the Jews and of the whole earth -

not a mere temporary Peace at the whim of man, for nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Micah 4: 1-4). That exceeds the hopes of the most enthusiastic member of any peace society. But it is coming, Christ is ordained to do it - His co-helpers are being prepared; and if you will you may share in the honour and glory and the immortality of His coming age of peace and goodwill, of "blessedness and power. To be associated with God's Kingdom through Jesus when He will be enthroned in the City of the Great King. This is our hope.

Geoff Maycock

Christ Is Coming

Christ is coming! Let creation
From her groans and travail cease;
Let the glorious proclamation
Hope restore and faith increase:
Christ is coming! Christ is coming!
Come, thou blessed Prince of Peace

Earth can now but tell the story
Of thy bitter cross and pain;
She shall yet behold thy glory,
When thou comest back to reign:
Christ is coming! Christ is coming!
Let each heart repeat the strain.

With that blessed hope before us,
Let no harp remain unstrung;
Let the mighty advent chorus
Onward roll from tongue to tongue:
"Christ is coming! Christ is coming!
Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come

THE TRUE VINE

An exhortation by Bro. P. Parry.

In our partaking of the Bread and Wine we are continually reminded of our covenant with God through the sacrifice of Christ. As human beings we are prone to forget this covenant, and therefore by the study of the word and these meetings it is kept continually before us. But God is not man that He should forget. Therefore we have His declaration to Moses concerning the covenant which He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage wherein they were strangers (Exodus 6 v 4). "And" says He (v 5), "I have also heard the groanings of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant" (v 6). God brought them out with an outstretched arm and showed many signs and wonders. They came out of Egypt through the slaying: of their first-born. They were tested in the wilderness, and the majority failed to manifest the faith which God required. For without faith it is impossible to please Him, etc. "With many God was not well pleased." Their carcasses fell in the wilderness. The remnant of those that came out of Egypt finally entered the Land under Joshua. But after the death of Joshua they continually transgressed.

Judges were raised up periodically to turn them from their evil ways. It succeeded to a degree, but they continued to be a stiff-necked and rebellious people, void of understanding. After a time they wanted to return to the way of Egypt and other nations; they desired a king, someone whom they could see with the naked eye, who would lead them out to battle. Of course, God had, in the past, fought their battles, and they should have seen this by faith. But no, they were blind to their Saviour and redeemer, the Rock of their strength. Therefore God hearkened unto them and gave them Saul, a man like themselves who thought that sacrifice was more pleasing to God than obedience. For this very reason he was removed. God chose David, a man whose intellectual standard in spiritual matters would put us to shame: yet he was not without fault, as Jesus was whom we remember in the Bread and Wine. David realised the transgressions of the nation over whom he ruled, and he looked forward to the time when his seed (Jesus) should sit on his throne, when God would cause His face to shine, and when Israel would be saved.

It is for this purpose and because God refused to listen to the people by reason of their continual sin, that the Psalmist was moved to utter those words which we find in Psalm 80 1:5, and 8:16; Yes the vine was burned with fire and destroyed when the king of Babylon and his army came against Jerusalem. Israel went into captivity. (We have a similar parable in Ezekiel 17:2-14 and 19:10). Hosea says in ch.9 v 17, "My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him, they shall be wanderers among the nations." He then declares "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself." God removed them from being a nation. The vine which he had planted was cut down and burned with fire; it was no use because it brought not forth good fruit. But nevertheless the root was still in the ground; there was nothing wrong with the root. The root was not responsible for anything that the branches might or might not bare providing it gave the necessary nutriment to them. Israel as a vine failed to avail itself of the opportunity given to it in the promises and covenant with its conditions of faith which is the root of salvation. Therefore they were rejected; burned with the fire of God's anger.

Jesus says in Revelation 22:16 "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." Isaiah, speaking of Jesus says, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground;" and again in 11:1 "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him." And continuing (verse 10 - future) "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious." We recall the parable of Jesus to the chief priests and elders of the people (Matthew 21:33-43). Jesus speaking to his disciples (John 15:1-3) said, "I am the true vine." Here is our position, then. We are the branches of the true vine and we are partakers, or should be, of its root and fatness. And by this process should bring forth much fruit.

Paul, also, had in mind the same thoughts in connection with Israel as the branches of the vine; only he refers to the olive tree. Nevertheless the same principle is brought out. Paul does not speak of Israel's failure in any boastful or slighting manner. But he commences his discourse in a very humble and sincere way. After all he had been through the mill and appreciated what his position would have been apart from the mercy of God in the revelation of Jesus Christ to him on the road to Damascus. And therefore he commences Romans 10.1. "They had a zeal of God but not according to knowledge. Are we any better than they? Have we a knowledge of God but no zeal? It is possible that this is so. Which is the worst of the two? It is hard to say. But both constitute hypocrisy. So Paul adds the warning: "If God spared not the natural branches take heed lest he also spare not thee." Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness, otherwise thou also shall be cut off. And they also if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again.

Therefore we conclude that the natural Jew has no pre-eminence whatever above the Gentile, as long as both abide in unbelief. For says Paul to Romans, "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose promise is not of men, but of God." For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." Both Jews and Gentiles are under sin and come short of the glory of God, and therefore if reconciled to him through faith in the blood of Christ, have the same claim to him as a father. "Seeing it is one God which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith". Therefore we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and if we be Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise, and we are part of the Israel which shall be saved.

Hath God, then, cast away his people? "God forbid" says Paul, "For I also am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" God hath not cast away His people whom he foreknew. Even at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. By this I mean Jews by descent who have accepted Christ as the Messiah. We have one to my knowledge in our fellowship at the present time, our bro. Leo Dreifuss; we hope there will yet be more, as no doubt there has been in the past. These are the natural descendants of Abraham, constituting by faith the true Israel of God, into which we Gentiles have been adopted through faith in Christ. A careful reading of Romans 11 would be most beneficial here. But when Christ is in the earth again as the Deliverer, Jewish conversion will be more apparent, for, says the

scripture, "He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them when I shall take away their sins." And so all Israel shall be saved.

We exclaim, like David (Psalm 14:7), "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion; when the Lord bringeth back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall be glad." Meanwhile, while we patiently wait for Christ we are being prepared. This is the time of our probation. If we are to bring forth fruit we must remain in the vine.

Every branch that does not bear fruit God taketh away. And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. You see, just a little amount of effort is not enough.

Purging or chastisement is necessary at all times to keep us pure in the doctrine, strong in the word and fruitful in every good work. We are to yield our bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:11).

Brother Phil Parry

New booklet:

"The Latest understanding of Dr John Thomas".

This latest booklet has been compiled in order to show the position of the Nazarene Fellowship in relationship to the Christadelphian community from which many of us have been excommunicated.

Having been turned out from their midst, we do not consider them our enemies but in our love for true Bible teaching we wish only that they should consider the things that brought about this situation.

Had they listened to Dr Thomas rather than to Robert Roberts there would never have been such Statements of Faith as the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith or the Birmingham Unamended Statement of Faith.

Hopefully too, there would not have been any statement of faith outside the pages of the Bible, and reasoned arguments would not have been quashed but encouraged (Isaiah 1:18) thus helping us all "to prove all things and hold fast that which is good."

It is our hope and our prayer that many who read this little booklet will take its message to heart and seriously consider where they stand in relation to the reason for the hope within them.

Printed copies are also available from the Nazarene Fellowship by E-mail to:-

bygrace@nazarenes.org.uk or it can be read on our website at

<http://www.thenazarenefellowship.co.uk/>

