

“I can’t understand...”

Some time ago we printed and circulated a leaflet explaining our reasons for doubting the correctness of Christadelphian teaching concerning the death of Jesus Christ. It may be that you, like some other brethren and sisters who have written or talked to us, have said, “I can’t understand what it is all about.” Others have recognised the scriptural soundness of our reasoning but object to our doubting the validity of the baptism of those, who, like ourselves, were immersed in ignorance of the true facts. We are therefore sending you this further letter with the object of showing plainly and simply what the issue is and why we take such a serious view of the question.

As Bible readers, it is hardly necessary to remind you that believers are, in Paul’s words, Ambassadors for Christ, and it is therefore most important that we should know Him whom we serve and not be in danger of misrepresenting Him in even small things; so that there is no room for carelessness or avoidable ignorance on questions which concern our understanding of Him.

Let us then suppose a friend enquiring the reason for your hope and belief, and you are asked,

“For whom did Christ die?”

Would you answer, “He died for Himself”?

Or suppose you were asked, “Was Jesus holy, harmless and undefiled?”

Would you reply, “His character was undefiled but His nature was unclean and sinful”?

Or if you were asked, “Is it possible to keep the commandments?”

Would you answer, “No, because our sinful flesh makes it impossible”?

Yet, if you are loyal to the doctrines of the community to which you belong, these are the answers you ought to give; but whether they are your own considered conclusions or not, so long as you do nothing to correct the Christadelphian position, and acquiesce in the excommunication of those who, like the writer, renounce them, you are responsible for them to God. It may be said that the answers need qualification, but no amount of explanation or qualification can change the abhorrent and unscriptural nature of the ideas involved; ideas which are quite clearly expressed in most versions of the Statement of Faith, and even though some have been astonished and incredulous that such beliefs are really in Christadelphianism, they are emphatically taught and defended in works such as “The Slain Lamb.”

We remind you, in all earnestness and without wishing to insult your intelligence, that it is our own personal and individual understanding of the Gospel and our response thereto, which will fit us for Salvation, and if we have to confess that we cannot understand how and why the death of The Saviour was necessary for our redemption, how can we be said to believe? Surely wisdom would urge us to devote a little time and thought to the matter so that we can be fully assured in our own minds and independent of others. If the day comes, which God forbid, that we are amongst those who have prophesied in the Name of Christ and yet are rejected, it will be small comfort that the authors and editors and leading lights of the Christadelphian world are rejected at the same time. We pray, with no sense of superiority, knowing that “we have nothing which we have not received” that time and reason may prevail to convince them of the seriousness of their misconceptions regarding the Lord who died for them.

You may be one of those who say, “The simple truth is enough for me,” to which we answer, “Amen.” The truth is simple and the cry now being raised that these doctrines are too deep for any

but those with long experience, is the same kind of eyewash that the Roman Catholic uses to prevent her followers discovering how and where they are being misled. The important question is whether you have the simple truth or a mixture of error originating in the traditional idea of the Fall of Man and elaborated in the brain of the late R.Roberts when he was faced by, and determined to destroy, the truth brought to light by Edward Turney in 1873.

Will you read the following outline of what appears to us to be the true Scriptural facts about Sin and Salvation, turning up the texts quoted and considering them in the light of your knowledge of the Bible and as far as possible with an unbiased mind?

1. Adam was created a natural man and placed under a law. Genesis 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:47.
2. By disobedience he brought himself under sentence to a violent death. Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12.
3. In God's mercy this penalty was only inflicted in type. Genesis 3:21; Romans 3:25.
4. The sentence comes upon all Adam's descendants when they are enlightened. Romans 5:12,13; John 3:19.
5. If they remain in Adam, thus neglecting salvation, they will suffer the penalty in the second death. Hebrews 2:3; Revelation 20:13,14,
6. Christ was born with the same nature as Adam and placed under a law. Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:17.
7. By perfect obedience He merited life, and as God's Son He did not come under Adam's sentence. John 8:23,29,36,44;
8. His sacrifice was the voluntary suffering of the actual violent death which Adam incurred. 1 Peter 3:18; Isaiah 53.
9. The sentence is therefore remitted for all who belong to Christ; they pass in baptism from death to life. Romans 8:1; John 5:24.

These are our views, and we ask you to consider them without prejudice; for holding them we have been disfellowshipped by the Christadelphians. That fact alone gives us little concern, but we are most anxious and concerned that you should know what you are doing before shouldering your share of the responsibility. Obviously some objections will occur to you, as in some points the truth cuts right across what you have held hitherto, but you will find all your questions adequately answered in our literature which you may have already received or which we will supply to you freely.

To enable you to make a comparison we will now give an outline of Christadelphian doctrine on the same lines; we shall state it as fairly as possible, and most of the phrases are verbatim statements by leading writers, but we can give no references as we believe there are none. If you decide, which we can hardly conceive, that they are true, we would suggest that you try to supply the proofs or turn up the texts which are given in the Statement of Faith purporting to support the assertions made.

1. Adam was created in a "neutral" condition.
2. As a result of sin his nature was changed and he became a dying creature.
3. As a punishment he lived a life of toil and sweat, and when he died he suffered the full penalty.

4. The sentence, a defiled, dying nature comes upon every human being irrespective of age or responsibility.
5. Christ was born with this inherent defilement.
6. Being begotten of God He received strength to do what no other man could do; live a perfect life.
7. His death was a ritualistic exhibition of what was due to sinful human nature, and was therefore necessary for His own salvation.
8. Although said to be saved, redeemed and forgiven those in Christ still suffer the penalty of sin.
9. An additional penalty, the second death, is in store for the Wicked.

You do not need a training in theology or even a college education to be able to compare these two outlines and decide where the complications and difficulties come from. The differences are not subtle, they are striking. In the first you have a perfect parallel between Adam and Christ, the one failed, the other succeeded; it is a plan which exhibits the love and mercy of God while at the same time upholding strict justice - a life for a life - not exacted but voluntarily given. In the second you have a scheme which reduces Christ's triumph over temptation to a sham fight, and makes His death the inescapable penalty of His defiled nature. So far as points 1,2,4,5,6 & 7 are concerned, we challenge anyone to produce a passage of Scripture which honestly interpreted supports any one of them. As regards points 3,8 & 9, these are based upon mistaken deduction from Genesis 3:19, and Romans 5:12, that natural death was the punishment for sin. We shall not go further into that question here as it has been dealt with elsewhere, and if you are interested in the matter, or even if like some, you are dumbfounded at the strangeness of the idea, we shall gladly supply you with the means of satisfying your mind. Remember, when you preach the Kingdom, you expect your friends to be open to conviction of the startling and incredible fact that they are not really going to heaven; is it too much to ask you to consider with similar reasonableness, the suggestion that natural death is not the Wages of Sin? We do assure you, with all the earnestness we can command, that if only you will have the courage to sort things out for yourself, you will be soon rewarded with a sense of mental freedom and confidence toward God which you have certainly not yet experienced, and which is impossible to those who adhere to their imperfect or perverted understanding of His purpose in Christ. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Despite the simplicity of the subject, however, you may still hesitate and feel yourself unfitted to take a decision on a doctrinal question of such importance in opposition to the majority. If so, it would almost suffice to remind you of the example of men like Abraham and Elijah, and women like Ruth and Rahab; if we are to be worthy of reward with those people we ought to be developing the same kind of independence and courage; they would not have exhibited the spirit of Laodicea when faced with an issue on a vital doctrine. If our reasoning could be answered why is it ignored so studiously? It may not have escaped your notice that the numerous Christadelphian magazines are singularly reluctant to deal with them.

But there is another line of approach which may help you to make up your mind. When the Apostle Paul spoke to the brethren at Ephesus, he called as witness to his authority, his manner of life (Acts 20), his zeal and steadfastness, while in another place, warning us against false prophets, Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." So that even the unlearned, who may feel obliged to depend to some extent upon their leaders for what they accept or reject, are supplied with an infallible test which only requires applying with the same commonsense and judgment that we employ in a thousand ways in our daily life.

When you observe leading brethren so hopelessly incapable of directing their own lives as to be engaged in vital war industries and all kinds of municipal and state service, even to the extent of being concerned in the prosecution of those conscientious objectors who refuse such service; when you see ecclesial rules juggled and vested interests and editorial dishonesty and suppression of facts to serve the interests of those in authority; when instead of meekness and humility you find arrogance, ambition and place-seeking and when you consider that there are at least six divisions of brethren all professing to believe essentially the same things and yet refusing to meet with one another; are these the “fruits” by which we should recognise those whom it is safe to follow?

These are rather the marks of those “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” Indeed, a seeker for truth would be looking in the right direction if he asked what people or doctrines all these divergent and worldly minded elements were most unitedly and bitterly opposed to, and he would find both his answer and his goal in those variously termed Renunciationists, Clean Flesh Heretics and Turneyites. For ourselves, we are thankful for the deliverance and enlightenment we have received at the hands of these so wickedly miscalled, and our only pang is for those whom we love and seek to help, but who so blindly resist the truth.

In conclusion, we address ourselves to those who have recognised that the Christadelphian position is indefensible both scripturally and logically, but who take no definite action to witness to the Truth of God and the Holiness of His Son.

There is One Faith, One Hope, and One Baptism, and to be a valid ceremony our baptism must be the seal set upon a true hope and sound faith. We recognise and agree that in the majority of cases, when we are baptised we have no more than an elementary understanding of the Plan of God and need to grow in knowledge as a new born child grows in strength. Nevertheless, as is indicated by the fact that Christadelphians require a Baptist, who may have been immersed according to that Faith, to be re-baptised, it is obvious that there is a certain essential minimum of knowledge. We ourselves might put that minimum actually lower than Christadelphians; but we see a wide and serious difference between lack of knowledge and positive error. The former can be remedied; a simple soul can grow in grace and knowledge, but if one has wrong beliefs they must be forsaken before one can even commence to grow in the Truth. Furthermore, if those wrong beliefs are such as to involve the integrity of the Almighty Himself, can a mere change of mind meet the situation? Is it not rather a case for a public confession of our faith? As a sect who hold that the Son of God was born under condemnation and had to die to atone for His own sinful nature, the Christadelphians are separated from the Truth by a wider gulf than they are from the Baptists. That is why we regard it as questionable whether one who has been immersed by Christadelphians, and has afterwards come to a knowledge of the Truth as it is in Jesus, has been scripturally baptised. To say the very least, there is a doubt, and for ourselves, where Eternal Life is involved, we want to avoid doubt.

“Whosoever shall confess me before men,
him shall the Son of man confess
before the angels of God.”
Luke 12:8

Ernest Brady.