

Islip Collyer and the Heretics

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers,
ye have need that one teach you again
which be the first principles of
the oracles of God.”

Our attention has been directed to articles in the Christadelphian Magazine for July and August 1945, under the heading “As we grow older,” by Islip Collyer. The author is a man of considerable reputation amongst Christadelphians as a writer and speaker and the remarkable assortment of mental curiosities which he displays before us and his ingenious self-contradictions provide an interesting and instructive study.

In the July issue he refers to a pamphlet which he says “attempts to atone for poverty of argument by a vigour of expression which degenerates into a type of rudeness futile in controversy.” He studiously refrains from naming either the pamphlet or the author; he does not quote an example of the expressions to which he takes exception, nor does he expose the poverty of the argument by any kind of evidence. It is only by his return to the subject in August that we detect that it is probably either “The Questions Christadelphians Cannot Answer” or “Jesus My Substitute” to which he is referring; if this be the case, we challenge him to justify his charge of rudeness by an actual quotation, or to demonstrate by Scriptural proof or reasoning that there is any defect in the argument. A copy of each will be sent free to any reader who would like to test the accuracy of his statement.

If it is rude to question the truth of the Christadelphian teaching that Jesus’ death was for Himself then they are certainly rude; if it is rude to prefer Scriptural truth on the nature of man to the hash of Augustinian error which Christadelphians share with the Apostasy, then we glory in our rudeness. We can well understand Islip Collyer’s chagrin that anyone should have the audacity to charge him publicly with believing and teaching falsehood; and worse, should advance in proof a reasoned Scriptural argument which beats him at every point, but unless he can meet our attack with something more substantial than an unsupported charge of “rudeness” he is going to find himself and his traditions swept away by the Flood of Truth.

He complains of having received three copies of one pamphlet and is unable to understand why anyone should circulate them; we shall prove in the following pages that, if he read either of them he has singularly failed to grasp the facts; and we will try, by reference to his own confusion on the subject to show that there is still room for plain speaking and clear thinking. Islip Collyer and his colleagues of the Christadelphian have no monopoly rights in contending for the faith; indeed it is a matter of opinion whether they are in the business at all. As many are beginning to realize, contending for The Faith and contending for The Statement of Faith are two different things.

He writes in his July letter of “that Hope which is able to transform us and make us fit for the Kingdom of God.” This is certainly a glorious truth with which we fully agree; but the governing term is “that Hope,” if it is not the true hope it cannot transform us. Let us see then how Islip Collyer’s hope works? In his August epistle he says he finds himself doing evil and finds sin dwelling in him. We can only - regretfully - take his words for it. It does not matter for the moment that he mistakenly thinks that something Paul wrote in Romans justifies his evil thinking; the very fact that he confesses that his hope is thus incapable of transforming him is proof that it is not the True Hope. This is exactly what we have asserted and sought with as much courtesy as is consistent with honesty, to prove.

Misjudging Paul

It is extraordinary that a man of Islip Collyer's experience in Biblical exposition could display so much ignorance of his subject as to apply Paul's statements in Romans 7 to himself as a man in Christ. If he has never read Dr Adam Clarke's comment,^{*See note below.} surely he has a copy of Elpis Israel and knows that even Dr Thomas says "The apostle affirms this of himself considered as an unenlightened son of the flesh." For a reader of any critical ability it should not be necessary to go beyond the very chapter itself. Paul certainly said "In my flesh dwelleth no good thing," but he was not referring to his physical body but to his life before he was "In Christ," saying "When we were (past tense) in the flesh," i.e., when he was "in Adam" as a servant of Sin; and he thanked God that he had been delivered out of the body of this death (Adam) and was henceforth living under the spirit of the law of life in Christ Jesus. But how anyone can read the 6th chapter of Romans with its 12-fold proof that one who is in Christ is in every sense delivered from sin and must not - cannot sin, or quote Paul as saying "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" and fail to observe that he adds "But ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit" is beyond comprehension. It suggests either a complete lack of capacity for abstract reasoning, for which he should be pitied; or the desire to justify his own unchristian walk by maligning the Apostle Paul, which deserves nothing but contempt.

If Islip Collyer finds it a matter of impossibility to keep himself from sinful thought or action he is to be pitied; but let him blame himself and cease to comfort himself that Paul was the same. He was not. The Apostle Paul could do all things through Christ; he counted all things but loss for the excellency of His Name; he knew there was laid up for him a crown of Life. He had to keep his body in subjection, certainly; so did Christ; and so ought we; and if Islip Collyer were not so obsessed with the idea that his flesh has gone bad, he might make a better job of it himself before concluding that Paul's life was such a hopeless struggle against his lower nature let our friend look for a single instance of sin or failure recorded against Paul after his conversion; or any evidence that it was not constantly his joy and delight to serve Christ and suffer in His service.

This is a matter of vital importance; it involves the character and the honesty not only of the Apostle Paul but of God Himself and we shall return to it; for the present, if those who hold this theory that every human being is "born in sin," and consequently is physically incapable of complete obedience could point out one single commandment which we cannot keep, they would stand some chance of justifying themselves; but as we know there is none we confidently affirm that the contention that flesh is full of sin is mistaken.

The true Hope really is able to transform us and make us fit for the Kingdom; it cannot and does not need to change our flesh but only our characters; man can live a perfect and obedient life - it was proved by One who did it. But what chance do Islip Collyer and his brothers stand either of approaching that Holiness without which no man shall see the Lord, or of being truly sorry for their failures, so long as they believe it is impossible for human nature to be obedient? Surely it should be recognized that when we do wrong it is not the fault of God for creating us with supposed sinful flesh, nor of our parents or ancestors for begetting us with an evil history, but simply our own fault for not doing right.

* Dr Clarke:- "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 to 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 without the Gospel, or showing what his own state was... while without Christ."

Pernicious Pamphlets

We have affirmed that Christadelphians are unable to give an explanation of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ which appeals to reason and justice and which is in harmony with all the Scriptures; we believe this to be the reason why it is scarcely ever dealt with in their preaching; they are conscious of the unreasonableness of the Creator making the whole of the race sinners and punishing them with death on account of one man's sin; they can see the injustice of God inflicting the same punishment on Jesus, who was sinless, as a condition of forgiving others; and they are aware that there are many Scriptures that directly contradict their teaching. So long as there was nothing better we all had to swallow it and make the best of it, blaming our own lack of "spiritual perception" for any mental discomfort we might occasionally experience. But the purpose of these "pernicious pamphlets," this "undesirable literature" which comes to Islip Collyer "uninvited" - and so unwelcome, is to put before them such an explanation. Christadelphians are faced to-day with a similar choice to the Jews in Christ's day; will they reject the Messiah in order to keep to their tradition or will they open their minds and accept the Holy One and the Just as their Saviour and Sacrifice and abandon their Sinful Flesh Representative?

Throughout the Christian era there may have been individuals, but there has never been a community who understood the Atonement; the truth about it was known and preached in apostolic days, but it seems to have been the first part of the truth to be lost and it is therefore not altogether strange that it should be the last to be rediscovered. Glimpses of it have been caught and expressed from time to time and various students, many of them Christadelphians, have in recent years seen the light in different directions; but because isolated phases of truth lack the strength to overthrow a whole system of doctrine even though much of it is erroneous, they have been as voices crying in the wilderness, their discoveries have been regarded as heresies and they have been howled down or excommunicated.

What Islip Collyer describes as "old heresies blended in a new way" is in fact, the integration of many different truths which have been advanced at different times, into a complete and perfect exposition of the purpose and reason for the Atonement.

It was impossible that this could have been done much before the present time, since it is only by the cumulative work of many people that all the facts have been gradually elucidated and brought together. There is a perfect parallel in the progress of scientific knowledge; all the laws and principles of nature have been in operation from the beginning of creation, but men were unable to understand or define them because of the absence of any framework of knowledge to which facts and theories could be related. It was for this reason that advanced thinkers like Galileo have been ostracized by their contemporaries; but to-day it is possible to see how the discoveries of the past, which at the time seemed utterly fantastic, fit into the pattern of ascertained fact.

In the same way, the true explanation of the Sacrifice of Christ, which was lost soon after the close of the apostles ministry has only become available as a result of the research of many men, accumulating facts and testing, examining and where necessary discarding theories and unproved conclusions. We owe this to the Christadelphian community, that it has provided the basis on which such work could proceed, and has thrown up here and there the right men for the task. Thus to-day, leaving those things that are behind, we can go on unto perfection. Instead of bemoaning the fact that in these last days his brethren and sisters are having their minds disturbed by the invitation to grow in grace and knowledge by their own study, and lulling them to sleep with his smooth words and subtle misrepresentation, Islip Collyer should count himself blessed to live in this evening time when there shall be light (Zechariah 14:7) and have the chance of sharing the flood of light that has burst forth.

If the exposure of our heresies was as simple a matter as he would like his hearers to believe, we do not think he would be so careful to conceal them, or that John Carter would think it necessary to exhort his own ecclesia not to read our pamphlets. If what we are setting forth were so hopelessly

preposterous they would surely say, “read them for yourselves and see what awful things they teach.” The time will come when concealment will fail and then we shall see what kind of defence innuendo and diplomacy will provide against the Sword of the Spirit. Until that time he would be well advised to follow the advice of one similarly situated and “Refrain... if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”

Substitution and Subtlety

He says our explanation of the great Sacrifice is the old theological conception of substitution. As we have repeatedly denied that we believe what he intends by this statement it is inexcusable for him to go on making it, and the obvious conclusion is that because he is unable to refute our actual teaching he resorts to the old stratagem of attributing to us something he is able to criticize.

Some years ago he wrote a pamphlet entitled “The meaning of Sacrifice” as a reply to the work of our esteemed Bro. Andrew Wilson. It contributed nothing to the question under discussion and he subsequently declined to enter into any correspondence on the score of not having time, but it contained this significant admission, “We have been told we ought to take action against the Clean Flesh Heresy. If we ask what it is, we are given a definition which is promptly repudiated by those who are supposed to hold it.” Robert Roberts had said that we teach that Jesus was of different nature from other men; we have nailed that lie, as in time we shall nail all the others concerning us, including those which Islip Collyer has lately found time to write.

Now we not only repudiate the theological conception he attributes to us; we shall show that it is actually he that has it in the back of his mind. We utterly reject the idea that God punished Jesus instead of Adam, or that His wrath against sinners was appeased by the infliction of suffering upon the innocent; but these horrible ideas are at the root of Islip Collyer’s own views of the Atonement. He says, and mark these words well... “It is not good to save alive the souls that should not live and slay those that should not die.” We fully agree, and have never suggested anything so foolish; but we definitely do believe that Christ died instead of sinners, and if we are heard with patience we can explain how and why. Islip Collyer rejects the idea completely - he says it has nothing in its favour; he does not tell us what he thinks Peter meant when he said “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust:” nor what Paul meant by the words “Christ died for the ungodly.” To do so would of course involve embarking on an exposition of why Christ had to die for sinners, and this he is very reluctant to do, even supposing he is capable. But it seems plain that he thus rejects both his Saviour and the means by which his Salvation has been accomplished.

Were it not that his subtlety is abundantly evident we could only feel sorry for him; we can lead him to water, but it is his own lookout if he remains thirsty. Let us analyse this statement of his; he says, “It is not good to save alive the souls that should not live” – of course it is not good, but the prerequisite of one who should not live being saved alive is repentance, when the question becomes, “Is it good that a repentant soul should be saved alive?” Apparently he has no room for mercy! Yet we are told “Mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James 3:13). “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not” (Lamentations 3:22). “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves” (Ephesians 2:8). “But God commendeth His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Then he says “It is not good to slay those that should not die.” This also is true; it was not a good thing to slay Jesus, it was a great evil; but God did not slay Jesus, it was by wicked hands that he was taken, and crucified, and slain; it was man’s failure that made it necessary and evil men accomplished it. But though it was an evil necessity it was God’s intention and the great and good purpose served was the redemption of the race. Life had been forfeited and Jesus had the ransom price, life, in His own power, and He was willing to pay it down to redeem humanity.

But now, to expose fully the wretchedness of Islip Collyer’s position, let us see how his statement looks from his own standpoint. Would he maintain that it is not good to save alive the souls

that have sinned? Since all have sinned this is equivalent to denying God the prerogative of exercising mercy; and when he says specifically “Those who have sinned will be blotted out of God’s book,” we must conclude, if his thesis is correct, that Salvation is impossible. Furthermore, when he says, referring to Jesus, “it is not good to slay those that should not die,” does he know of any reason why he should have died, seeing he was not a sinner but a perfect righteous man? We cannot see how it can be any more good to slay one whose only fault was in being born a man, than to slay one who should not die.

In this connection it is rather interesting to recall that a year ago Islip Collyer was writing in *The Testimony*, with the manifest intention of defaming Edward Turney and his teaching, which he described in the following words; “When worked out as a complete theory it involved a return to the old theological idea of all men being held as personally responsible for Adam’s sin, so that even a perfectly righteous man performing the will of God in all things would still have been held guilty of the sin of Adam.”

This is not a true description of Edward Turney’s view, and, as we have fully explained in other places, men are only related to Adam’s sin in a federal sense - they are required by the Scripture to regard themselves as included under it in order to take part in the redemption from it - but we quote it here for the purpose of showing how Islip Collyer contradicts himself. He spurns the idea that a perfectly righteous man who performed the will of God in all things would still have been held guilty of the sin of Adam; and he has already told us that it is not right to slay one who should not die. Then we invite him to explain to us on what principle he justifies the death of Christ. Was He held guilty of the sin of Adam? If not, how and why did He come under condemnation as stated in clauses 8,9,10 and 12 of the Statement of Faith?

He has put himself in the unenviable position of having to decide whether God did what was not right, by slaying One who should not die, or whether He did what was unjust by imputing guilt to One who was not personally guilty. On his own showing there is no other choice open to him, since he has categorically rejected the only other alternative - that Jesus was not under condemnation nor liable to death in any sense but that His Sacrifice was the voluntary bearing of the penalty which Adam incurred but never paid.

Artificial Fog

But there is worse to come; when he proceeds to deal with the penalty of sin he tumbles right into the error which he has often exhorted others to avoid, of using unscriptural expressions. He refers to Christ’s sacrifice as “a temporary death” and he speaks of unredeemed sinners “paying the full penalty due to sin.”

Presumably he visualizes redeemed sinners as paying only part of the penalty, but we will not charge him with this folly as he does not actually utter it and he has quite sufficient to account for in black and white. We should like him to produce any kind of justification outside his own clouded brain for various degrees of the penalty for sin, or any Scripture for nonsense like “a temporary death.” The Bible knows only one penalty for sin, namely death, with out degrees or qualification. It can be inflicted in many different ways, but the effect upon the sinner is extinction, final, complete and utter destruction. There is no question of anyone paying a part of the penalty of suffering “a temporary death;” if a sinner “bears his sin,” i.e., suffers his own penalty, he is put to death and he perishes. There have been, since He is a merciful God, comparatively few instances in which it has been carried out. The Flood, the cities of the plain, men like Nadab and Korah and other presumptuous rebels are examples of men who bore their sin and died, and there is no hope for such. But most of those who are related to the purpose of God from Adam onwards, have been redeemed, either typically under the Law of Sacrifice or by Baptism into Christ under the new dispensation, and have thus passed through the death for sin, symbolically, their faith being accepted for the reality. But

those who, like Islip Collyer, reject the covering which Christ has provided for them by His death will be amongst those found at the wedding feast without a garment.

There are two snags in his mind which lead him to agitate himself with temporary deaths and full penalties; one is the fact of natural death and the other is Jesus' resurrection. He realizes that to suffer the penalty of sin involves perishing and he cannot see how Jesus can have suffered the penalty instead of Adam and not have remained dead. The point is really wonderfully simple provided we adhere to the scriptural facts and avoid what Islip Collyer terms "the interpreting in harmony with plainly enunciated facts," all that is necessary is to keep in mind that it is 'death' that is the penalty, the actual suffering of death and not the fact of remaining dead. The important point is this; if Adam had borne the penalty himself, he would have remained dead; he would have perished, because he was a sinner, whereas Jesus could suffer it for him and not perish because He was a righteous man. The grave would have held Adam; it could not hold Jesus; He met the claim of Sin upon the life of His brother Adam by giving His own life instead, a life for a life; after which the grave had no more dominion over Him. However much Islip Collyer dislikes God's way, it is plainly written "For Christ also hath once suffered for sin, the just (or righteous) for the unjust (or unrighteous) that he might bring us to God, being put to death IN the flesh but quickened IN the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). We believe this and praise and thank God that His mercies are new every morning in not blotting the whole race out of existence as would have been the case had Adam been put to death for his sin. Here we see the marvellous Wisdom and Love of God revealed in His glorious Plan of Redemption; if the life of Adam had been taken he would have eternally perished, but the provision of One who received His life fresh from the source and who never forfeited it and who willingly gave his life in the blood as a ransom, Adam and we in him, have been redeemed.

A Defiled Offering

If Jesus had been guilty or in any sense under condemnation He could not have been a sacrifice. Do not all the ordinances and types of the Law prove that every offering for sin must be perfect, undefiled, and legally and physically clean? Islip Collyer writes, "The theorists offer no explanation why the penalty was paid by a righteous man instead of by a guilty one." We must confess it had never occurred to us that anyone would be so foolish as to propound such a fatuous question, but if he is seeking information we must endure him patiently. Could a sinner have redeemed other sinners? If it had needed a guilty man then there was no need for Jesus. A guilty man could not have redeemed even himself; nor could one who was a son of Adam and in the federal condemnation; that is why no man can by any means redeem his brother; but Jesus could and did, because He had both the legal and the moral qualification.

He asks why so many of Christ's disciples also suffer violent deaths if the penalty was paid. Some undoubtedly did die similar violent deaths, but they were not sacrifices nor were their deaths related to Sin and could not have redeemed anyone; their martyrdom was due to their following of Christ no doubt, and apart from their faithfulness they might have lived normal lives, but they could have had no hope of Eternal Life if Christ had not died for them. To compare His Sacrifice with the violent deaths of some of His saints just shows how imperfect is Islip Collyer's conception of the atoning virtue of His death.

Natural Death

In the same context he asks why it is that millions of Adam's sons die peacefully in their beds after living out the full period of their mortality, Without going into the several questions involved, in detail, we would suggest to him that the fact that as non-responsible creatures of the dust they live and die like other species of the animal creation, proves that they simply perish without law. They are naturally corruptible creatures; God does not punish them for ignorance, and their natural death is not in any sense a penalty or punishment but merely the natural end to a natural life. It would probably surprise Islip Collyer to learn that those same millions would never have existed at all to enjoy their

natural lives had not Christ died to purchase it for them: but if he would turn up 1 Timothy 4:10 and 1 John 4:14, he would find it to be a fact!

Islip Collyer's next complaint is what he calls our revival of the violent death theory of 50 years ago. It is true that we believe that the death which Adam incurred was an inflicted death and some brethren did perceive this years ago, but they had not reached the point of realizing where natural death comes in; they held the view that the sentence was commuted and carried out as a slow process instead. We do not hold that view; we affirm that natural death has nothing to do with sin and that since man is a corruptible creature and we have no reason to conclude that he was ever anything else, then corruption is the natural course of his nature. He shows either his misapprehension of our real teaching or his intentional misrepresentation in his statement "It has been argued that the death due to Adam, and through him to all his descendants, was a violent death by slaying." Part of this is quite untrue; we have never argued so and do not believe that all men are liable to a violent death because of Adam's sin. But had God not chosen to deal with us on the Federal Principle, but regarded men as individually responsible, we should have incurred the penalty by our own disobedience. The Bible plainly teaches that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). "Every man shall be put to death (slain) for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:36). Islip Collyer believes everyone dies because of Adam's sin, which is a violation of simple justice. We do not earn natural death, nor are we subject to it because of Adam's sin. We are, of course, well aware of the Christadelphian view which he advances, but when he can give us an example of the phrase "Dying thou shall die" meaning anything but an execution or inflicted death, we will consider his suggestion that "in the day" means within a thousand years! Because Genesis 2:4 is not restricted to a 24 hour day and defines a particular epoch, we must put this interpretation upon every other 'day' of Genesis; this is another example of his "harmonious interpretation." But one question will suffice to show our friend that unless he is careful he will find himself among the evolutionists - did it take an epoch (or a day as recorded) to create Adam?

He next resorts to a quibble of which he should be ashamed. We truly assert that Adam died symbolically when the animals were slain to clothe them; but he asks "was a symbolic death all that was meant by the words 'Thou shalt surely die'?" Such wilful mis-understanding is a poor weapon and must disconcert even his staunchest admirers. It would be evident to Adam what those words meant when he saw the lambs slaughtered, even as it is evident to us what they mean when we contemplate our Saviour nailed to the Cross. He suffered the awful reality and endured the pains of death for us, on our behalf, because He loved us and was willing to do it for us; "I lay down my life for the sheep." In His mercy and for the love of Christ, God allows us to suffer it symbolically in baptism; we should be thankful for the fact and not despise or minimize His love by arguing that because we do not suffer it, therefore we do not deserve it. The idea that our natural death - that is, supposing we die, - is in any sense either a penalty or a contribution to our own Salvation, robs Christ of the honour due to Him and represents God as charging twice for the same thing.

A Queer Mixture

In the next paragraph we have as curious a combination of jargon and misquotations as we have ever seen. These are Islip Collyer's actual words ("Christadelphian," page 86) and they deserve a frame; "Thus through the inevitable principle of inheritance 'we have the sentence of death in ourselves.'" He is wise enough not to give the reference to his proof text in case any of his readers might have had the curiosity to turn up 2 Corinthians 1:9 and discover that there is absolutely no connection. Paul is speaking of an occasion when he had been at the point of death as a result of injury or illness, and he says that as a result of the prayers of the brethren God delivered him. There is nothing to do with sin, nothing to do with nature, or mortality, or condemnation - he was sick unto death and expected to die, but he recovered and thus had no longer the expectation or sentence of death in himself. A worse example of wresting the Scriptures would be hard to find.

But what of his "inevitable principle of inheritance"? Is this a Scriptural principle, a biological principle, or just another Christadelphianism? It is probable that there is some sort of biological law

of heredity, but if Islip Collyer knows how it operates he is a good way in advance of science; it is thought that some tendencies can be inherited, but it is by no means proved, and it is generally conceded that environment plays a much more important part in the development of the individual, but so little is actually known of the psychological and biological processes that to talk of “Inevitable principles” is to invite ridicule. He says a little later, “it would surely be nonsense to suggest that men could sin for a thousand years without it having any effect on their flesh.” It sounds a very plausible idea, but instead of giving us some evidence of a general decline in the moral or physical nature of man, he says “We know something of what is meant by habit in individual life.” but this is a totally different matter; Islip Collyer is surely not so innocent as to think that habits are inheritable.

As a simple matter of history we affirm that to-day man is neither worse nor better than when he was created. Here, briefly, is the evidence. Adam was created “very good,” but he managed to sin, without any inherited tendencies or racial habits; this single fact writes ‘Finis’ to Islip Collyer’s theory. But he believes that Adam’s flesh was changed to ‘sinful flesh’ after he sinned. Let us see then how he gets on? Were his evil tendencies passed on to Cain? Alright, then how did Abel manage to escape them and obey God? And what happened to Enoch’s evil tendencies that he managed to please God? After a thousand years of sin, when the whole earth was corrupted, we find Noah was a righteous man; how could he have been if sin had got into the flesh and Islip Collyer’s “inevitable principle” was at work? Abraham, after another thousand years of sin, was a faithful man who pleased God. Take another millennial jump, to David; Ah! now we see it coming out! Rubbish; was there anything in David’s inheritance which made obedience impossible? Another thousand years brings us to Christ, with a longer ancestry of fallible human nature than any of these. Was He able to live obediently? Was He tempted in all points as we are? Was He without sin? Islip Collyer is as ignorant as those who came to Jesus and asked “Who did sin, that this man was born blind?”

Sin is transgression of law and cannot become a fixed principle of the flesh. Man to-day is as capable of keeping the commandments as ever he was. It is not the flesh that is at fault, but behaviour and character. No one denies that all people do not start level; some are born with weaknesses in certain directions or with tendencies to disease, while others receive all kinds of advantages, but these are differences in talents received, and they will be taken into account at the day of reckoning. If it is as he says, that “racial habits and inherited tendencies start us on the broad road,” who is to blame? What say had we in our physical creation or the kind of parents we had or the flesh we received? If we are born as Islip Collyer says, under such a disability and with an inherited bias in the direction of evil, what is the use of Jesus exhorting us, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven is perfect.”

Robbery with Violence

The truly terrible aspect of the Christadelphian position which this discussion has brought to light, is that logically followed out doctrine leaves no need for a Sacrifice in any true sense, and to uphold their declared belief they are driven to a denial of the Saviour. We assume that Islip Collyer can be regarded as a reliable exponent of their views; and we will now show from his writing how Christ is robbed of his honour and violence done to the Revelation of God.

He says, “We are spoken of (note the words) as being redeemed, of being bought with a price, with the precious blood of Christ. We are also shown the righteous as having washed their robes and made them whiter in the blood of the Lamb.” “These,” he says, “are symbols and metaphors. The plain truth is that sins are remitted through the forbearance of God.” This is subtlety with a vengeance; he lumps together the literal fact that Christ’s blood was shed to redeem us, and the figure of speech of the righteous being cleansed by that blood, and says, “These are symbols and metaphors.” Someone should ask Islip Collyer when next they break bread with him whether he is memorialising a symbol and a metaphor or the actual fact that Jesus died literally for us. If there was no redeeming virtue in the blood of Christ, why was it precious? If it had merely a symbolic value and sins could have been remitted, as he says, simply by an act of forgiveness, what purpose has been

served by the death of Christ? If a symbol or a metaphor could have met the case, why did not Jesus die a symbolic death instead of having to suffer the dreadful reality? Are we not justified in saying they do not want a Saviour? "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition."

We have already dealt with his attempt to prove that Christ did not suffer the penalty of sin; nor can he agree that it was the payment of a debt, nor was it on behalf of others; that he says, would be unjust; no one can bear another's penalty. Is not this a complete contradiction of Scripture? Does not God tell us that Christ did suffer for sins; that it was the payment of a debt; that it was on behalf of others; and that Christ did bear our penalty? We believe God and say the truth is not in Islip Collyer. But let us hear what he offers by way of an alternative. "Jesus can save because He partook of our nature with all its inherited weakness. He was made in all points like his brethren and tempted as they are, but He never failed..." We fully agree with this as far as it goes, but it is only a fact and not a reason. But notice, Islip Collyer does not think it necessary to explain how it was that Jesus managed to overcome the flesh with all its "inherited tendencies" and "racial habits;" its "law of sin in his members" and its "metonymical sin-in-the-flesh" and live a perfect life. Yet surely this is a vital point.

If we ask him the question he will reply "It was because as the Son of God, He was specially empowered to overcome the flesh." How he agrees this with His being made and tempted like us we cannot imagine, nor what virtue there can have been in His obedience to cause God to highly exalt Him. If He was born with or given a power to overcome which we do not have, was not His obedience a foregone conclusion, and no more remarkable than any other linked cause and effect? Nor does he explain what purpose he thinks was served, except to say, "Thus he took hold of sinful human nature and conquered it, finally nailing it to the cross." It is apparently legitimate for Islip Collyer to play fast and loose with Scripture "the body of Jesus" for "the hand-writing of ordinances" of which the Apostle speaks; if so there is no limit to where he can get or what he can prove. Jesus was nailed to the Cross, but the purpose was not the punishment of an innocent man, or the destruction of a holy body in which Jesus lived a perfect life, nor was it the "ritual exhibition of what was due to sinful flesh" (R. Roberts), because God does not punish the innocent, His body was not destroyed nor was His flesh sinful.

Why Did Christ Die?

The purpose of Christ's death was to destroy the Devil (Hebrews 2:14), him that had the power of death, and as we can discover from such Scriptures as 1 Corinthians 15; Romans 5; and Genesis 3, the Devil was the first Sin Personified, into whose power Adam sold himself and all his family (John 8:34; Romans 6:16). The Devil was destroyed and his power over the race terminated by the payment by One who was not under his dominion, of the debt incurred, to wit, a life. This life was Adam's, and since we all come from Adam it was the life of the race; if Jesus had been part of that life He would Himself have been in the bondage and would not have had anything to pay with. That is why Jesus derived His life from God and not from Adam. Jesus belonged to God. Adam and all his belonged to Sin (John 8:35,36), and when Jesus was delivered into the hands of the rulers of this world, the Sin Power, to suffer death on the Cross, it was God giving His own Son to buy us back from Sin; and when Jesus voluntarily submitted to His Father's will, it was because He knew that it was only by the discharge of the claim of Sin, vested in the Law, that His fellow men could be saved. He was the only One of human race who could by any means redeem His brother and give a ransom for him (John 8:42-44).

Islip Collyer's pitiable confusion results in his conclusion that our Saviour's Sacrifice was no more than the logical completion of an obedient life; "He was faithful unto death," he says; but so, as he shows, were many of His disciples; he thinks Christ's death was no different from theirs and he thus arrives at the point where he says, "His sacrifice cannot be described as the paying of a debt except in the language of a metaphor." If this is not that Damnable heresy of 2 Peter 2:1 of "even denying the Lord that bought them," what is it? And having denied the need for and efficacy of the

Atonement and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing (defiled nature), it is not surprising that he falls into his last error, of teaching Justification by works.

He says, "God very reasonably demands that condemned rebels can only draw near to Him behind a perfect leader." We confess we had never thought of God as allowing condemned rebels to draw near to Him behind any kind of cover; our conception was that a repentant and contrite spirit was the first essential. But the importance of Christ's sacrifice is surely that it obtained for those who accept it, a reconciliation. "While we were yet sinners" which no degree of personal righteousness could have encompassed.

Our redemption is not subject to any condition; it was purchased for us by Christ when He paid our debt and was presented to us freely, as a gift of grace; all that is required of us is that we do not forfeit it by unworthy conduct. But when Islip Collyer renounces redemption as a mere metaphor and winds up "He will only forgive us if in faith and obedience we follow our Captain to the limit of our strength," he is destroying the very foundation of Salvation; he seems to have forgotten that he has spent himself to prove that we are physically incapable of following our Captain. If only he would go back to the beginning and discover, as we have, that human flesh was never changed and that nothing evil was implanted, he would wipe away most of his trouble at one stroke. If only he would open his heart and mind to the understanding of our Saviour's Sacrifice which would then be possible, he would find it has a wonderful transforming power, and he would experience something of the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

If we have seemed to deal roughly with what he has written, It is only because we believe he is defending error and many simple and sincere people are like to lose their crown by following it; we assure him that we have no personal feeling in the matter, and hope he will forgive us for any apparent unkindness. In view of the uneasiness in the minds of many Christadelphians and of the garbled version of our teaching which has appeared in the last two issues of the Magazine, we propose to Islip Collyer that he engages with the undersigned, in a discussion in its pages, on equal terms and without editorial interference, so that its readers may be fully informed of the issues at stake.

Ernest Brady.
(1945)