

# **NATURAL DEATH AND JUDICIAL DEATH**

**A COMMENTARY ON A BOOKLET BY PETER WATKINS  
ENTITLED**

## **"The Cross of Christ – Bible Teaching about Redemption"**

The booklet bearing the above title was sent to an experienced student and reader of the Bible and was passed on to me for my comments as to its claim for endorsing Bible teaching about Redemption through the sacrificial death of Christ.

As a matter of fact, having known the late Peter Watkins and the Christadelphian community's doctrine he taught and defended, I know that their theory of the meaning of the death of Christ does not accept it as a sacrifice.

It is as well therefore to know with whom we are dealing, both with the author and the views and teaching of the community to whom he owes his allegiance on the basis of its Statement of Faith or creed, and not necessarily Bible truth. It is not that I am not qualified to judge their doctrinal position; I have known and examined it for the past 57 years and exposed the many errors and contradictions of their leaders and writers, and many have come to this realisation among them, but have kept silent, resigned, or have been disfellowshipped.

Many readers of Peter Watkins' booklet who are not aware of his indoctrination and obsession against human nature being as God created it in the beginning would think most of what he says to be quite plausible and acceptable, not realising the underlying false premise upon which he is basing this very important subject.

He commences with a description of crucifixion by stating,

"In reality it was a stark and hideous spectacle. Crucifixion must surely be one of the most monstrous of all human inventions. Scourging sometimes preceded crucifixion. Next the victim was nailed through hands and feet to a wooden cross which was then lifted to a vertical position and fixed firmly in the ground. Then he was simply left to die."

I agree that this was a stark and hideous spectacle to behold, but more so with a man who was begotten of God and had maintained His right as a Son of God by remaining sinless, but Peter Watkins says,

"It was such a shameful death that some contended that Jesus could not have been the Son of God because God would never have allowed His Son to die such a vile death."

There is a certain amount of truth in this reasoning because under any other circumstances except for His being a willing and Redemptive Sacrifice for the world, God would never have allowed the inflicted death by bloodshedding of His Son who was without

sin in all respects, albeit He could have died by reason of His corruptible nature if left to Himself without a change to an incorruptible nature.

But how then could He die the judicial death due to Adam's transgression - the death by sin which Paul teaches in Romans chapter 5 and which has nothing to do with the common death of the natural creation, animal and human? The idea of the common natural death of a "living soul" being the sentence passed on Adam for his sin is contrary to the teaching of the Bible and with such a false conception it is impossible for Peter Watkins to give a true meaning of the death of Christ as a Redemptive Sacrifice, in fact with his predecessors and some of his contemporaries, he teaches that the flesh of all men, including Jesus became infected with sin and a tendency toward sin through God changing it from what it was at creation, by reason of Adam's transgression; the flesh from then on being obnoxious to God.

No paradox equal to this can be found other than in Christadelphian teaching and literature. See Clause V of their Statement of Faith. Adam sinned while in the very good nature as a living soul; there was no need for God to increase his ability to sin by introducing a physical and compulsive element into the flesh to make it or style it as "sinful flesh," nor was there any need to change the nature to cause decay and death, the latter was already a fact of his nature at creation. Peter Watkins quotes this on page 5 yet Clause V nullifies it by forcing acceptance of a nature not found in the Bible, an imaginary nature that not even the Apostle Paul had any knowledge of.

But in the period of writing this booklet he supports another nature foreign to Bible teaching, a nature which was accepted by the Apostate Church of Rome through Constantine; the doctrine of sin-in-the-flesh or a compulsive bias to sin in human nature whereby it becomes synonymous of sin. Yet Peter Watkins is teaching that Jesus had nothing in common with the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, a motley crowd who conspired to put Him to death, and he explains,

"What a shocking commentary on human nature, for all this type of people were against the righteous principles and teaching of the Son of God."

I marvel at this, seeing that he accepts that a compulsive element and bias to sin was in their nature. Why does he continually confuse human character under law with the physical human nature under physical law? Because he is committed to this false conception through the indoctrination of Robert Roberts and his successors, yet Christ was of the same human nature to which he refers his "shocking commentary." He goes on to say,

"Human beings just cannot tolerate a person whose one ambition in life is to obey the laws of God... human beings reject the standards required by God. They prefer to obey their own human instincts..."

He then goes on to quote the words expressed by Jesus who was a human being, a man tempted in all points as we are, yet because unlike Peter Watkins, He knew that as human beings we are as God made Adam from the beginning, he was justified in condemning men's unlawful practices and speaks of them in Mark 7:21-23. Peter Watkins fails to quote what Jesus said also about human nature in Matthew 12:35, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things," he is only concerned with the false concept that human nature is sin, and in doing so he convicts Christ, who was definitely of human nature but not by human begetting of the will of the flesh.

It was not human nature that Jesus was condemning but sin, or rightfully and scripturally stated, transgression of law. If sin were an element of the physical flesh it would mean that sin was continuous transgression and unavoidable - it should also have affected Jesus who was without sin. One should see the danger to which such errors can lead with such a false and negative attitude towards human nature, in fact because Jesus was human nature it is said that He was "sin" through His birth of Mary and in quoting 2 Corinthians 5:21 the statement of Paul is misapplied to teach that Jesus was "sin-nature" or as I have heard some say "Serpent Nature," whereas Paul was not referring to the birth of Jesus but to His death.

The latter part of verse 20 giving the reason why people should be, and need to be reconciled to God, "for He hath made Him to be a 'sin-offering' for us (not for Himself), that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." See Isaiah 53 as proof of this.

There is quite a difference in quoting from the Bible and expounding the true meaning of what is quoted. Peter Watkins is very much at fault on this matter where on page 6 speaking of the tragedy of Eden he confuses the judicial inflicted death Adam merited by sin (Romans 5:12) with his already corruptible nature which left to itself without a spirit change would inevitably have succumbed to death and a return to dust. "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

As Head of the natural creation, Adam lost the right to perpetuate a more glorified state and was replaced by another Son of God, Jesus, styled the Last Adam, the Head of a New Creation, who was to come; the letter to Hebrews, 2:5 to 10 confirming David's Psalm 8:4 reference to Adam, but enlarging upon it in reference to Christ and His death on the Cross, which was not a penalty due to Himself but allowed by the grace of God for every man.

In quoting Romans 5:12 Peter Watkins is making Paul's legal terms to apply to the physical, yet he and his predecessors have agreed that Adam was made a living soul subject to death if not changed to spirit nature, so that the death Adam experienced at 930 years of age was not by sin, but by reason of his corruptible nature being allowed to take its course.

The taking away of his life in the blood in the day he sinned, was the penalty Adam merited by sin, but in the mercy of God was spared through Jesus the Lamb of God typified in Eden as slain from the foundation of the world. This is the death Paul speaks of in Romans 5 and which Jesus teaches in John 5:24,25 in the present tense and must refer to the legal and moral position not the physical; see also 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." What death? Not the common death surely, for all in Christ are still capable of the common death which Peter Watkins says is the penalty for sin. See also Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:10-14; 3:1-10.

Peter Watkins says:

"Like begets like. Adam disobeyed and became a sinner, and all his children follow him in the way of sin."

This is not true. It cannot be said of righteous Abel, nor of Seth, nor of Enoch who walked with God and had this testimony that he pleased God, nor of Noah of whom God said

“Thee only have I found righteous in this generation.” There are many more, like Abraham for example.

Peter Watkins uses phrases such as “Adam’s sin stricken race” “all who are in Adam to use a Scriptural expression - are likewise subject to death:” “Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Here again Peter Watkins is wresting Scripture out of context. It was not natural death that passed upon Adam but Judicial death from which he was redeemed, so that all in his loins would never have existed but for this provisional substitute-animal slain at the time. All in his loins are imputed to have sinned as members of Adam’s body but they are not convicted as actual sinners because they were not even born. This applies also in the case of Romans 3:23 for all had not sinned when Paul wrote this, but it is explained more fully in his epistle to the Galatians 3:22, “But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.”

To be concluded under sin and to be actual sinners are two different things, this is what Paul is endeavouring to show, and to reveal the Love and Mercy of God and also His justice, not the injustice that appears if we are to accept Peter Watkins’ view that all men are condemned to death for Adam's sin before they have been born or had committed sin personally.

Under the heading “Sin and Death” Peter Watkins treats Romans 5:12 as relating to natural death to which all creation is subject not because of sin, but by creation of God, it has no relation to sin and death by violation of God's law, and where he quotes “The wages of sin is death,” this is what Paul refers to as wages received from Sin personified as a master, for services rendered to him as slaves in his bondage - sold under sin by Adam.

If we become servants of God by redemption or release by Ransom from this bondage, we become free from sin and death, but our physical corruptible nature remains the same and we are still subject to natural death, yet we are said to have died unto sin when baptised into the death of Christ which, please note, was not by natural decay, but an inflicted death by the shedding of blood. He goes on to say:

“Adam broke God’s law and paid the penalty.”

If this were true, and this same death had passed upon all men in this literal and physical manner, then all men in like manner pay their own penalty for a sin they were never guilty of. What an injustice! How can God redeem and forgive and yet exact a full penalty? This is not Bible teaching about Redemption, but a God dishonouring doctrine of men void of the Spirit’s teaching.

The fact is that neither Adam nor his descendants pay the penalty Adam incurred, Jesus paid it for all, but this does not mean all are saved from the legal sentence of death hanging over them by imputation; but they can by being enlightened to this alienation and bondage, come out of the “in Adam” position into Christ, so passing now from death unto life. Physically impossible now, but not in the way Jesus and His Apostles taught it. Why was Jesus crucified? Peter Watkins says that it was because the Jews hated Him and wanted to get rid of Him. He says that this was one obvious reason, but surely God could have stopped them committing this terrible crime. I marvel that he sees it as a terrible crime in view of his acceptance of Clause XII of their Statement of faith which states,

“Jesus was put to death by the Jews and Romans, who were however, but instruments in the hands of God, for the doing of that which He had determined before to be done, viz, the condemnation of sin in the flesh, through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all, as a propitiation to declare the righteousness of God, as a basis for the remission of sins.”

Here we have a terrible crime through the instrumentation of God working in evil men to cause the death of His sinless Son to declare His righteousness and this criminal act as a basis upon which He forgives sin. Does it not declare God’s unrighteousness as a perpetrator of such a crime? How degraded in mind can people get when obsessed with the false doctrine of sin in the flesh, including that of Jesus! This fact is further proved in Clause VIII in stating of Jesus,

“He was raised up in the condemned line of Abraham and David, and who though wearing their condemned nature was to obtain a title to resurrection by perfect obedience, and by dying, abrogate the law of condemnation for Himself and all who should believe and obey Him.”

This is putting the cart before the horse; in other words, reversing the process of redemption and reconciliation to God. It shows Christ to be alienated from God and condemned, yet obtaining in an alienated and condemned position a title to resurrection before death, and by a death due to His condemned position by law, abrogate that law by suffering its penalty. What a paradox; what an exposition of the reason Christ died! It is undoubtedly shared by Peter Watkins as he implies in his reference to the Brazen Serpent later on – that Christ had a serpent-nature, but first he speaks of the procession who follow Adam, but of course this must refer to Adam when he sinned, not his conduct after ejection from Eden for there is no record other than his living 930 years, his begetting of sons and daughters, and dying. He says of these followers of Adam that

“When death looms large before them they start dragging their feet, but all to no avail. Although they are not willing to die, death claims them. The Lord was different. He always resisted sin, and He accepted death. Thus He declared by His life and His death that Adam was wrong and God was right. To accept death as a just reward of ones sins is exceptional. But to accept death without ever having sinned marks out the Lord Jesus as a unique person.”

I say Amen to that, but what of Peter Watkins’ idea that Jesus had to die because He was human nature? Who but a follower of R.Roberts, A.D.Norris and W.F.Barling would have the gall to say there was no injustice in the death of Jesus?

Jesus was not facing the natural death other people he speaks of were dreading; He was facing the stark reality of the Cross and prayed to His Father that if it were possible, to be delivered from it, but He also knew that this was the important mission He had been appointed to fulfil - the giving of His life as the Ransom for many (Mathew 20:28). Were it not for this His Father would have prevented His death of the Jews and Romans for there was no cause of death in Him; the Jews could find none, neither could Pilate, but of course Robert Roberts and certain others were not there at the time to explain it to them, the cause being as they teach - His condemned human nature.

How can condemned human nature be a “sacrifice”? How can One whose life is under pledge or forfeit to the law, give that life as a “Ransom” to release others in the same hopeless position? Peter Watkins and some others have seen this difficulty and instead of recognising that Christ died the death Adam incurred by sin they invented the theory of Christ being a representative and His death a mere martyrdom that by His righteousness unto death, God accepted it as a substitute for our failure and a basis for His forgiveness.

Later on Peter Watkins goes on to say that baptism is the equivalent of sharing Christ’s death, but first he stresses the fact that Jesus was of our nature and I accept this and the quotations he refers to in the Bible, but I disagree with him where he says, “Jesus, by resisting sin and accepting death.” This phraseology is not correct; Jesus resisted temptation to sin all His life, but He was not compelled to accept death; He voluntarily offered Himself to God as the Ransom Price for Adam and all in him on the Federal Principle, His death was in the place of Adam’s, it was substitutionary for the death Adam did not experience.

Baptism of a believer into Christ’s death is not the same as experiencing and suffering the physical pain Jesus did, it is symbolic and substitutionary for the physical taking away of life as with the animal sacrifices under the Law of Moses, the offerer did not experience death but recognised it as the penalty for the sinner, and God accepted it as a substitute for the time then present, but His own Son as the fulfilment of the animal type.

I only wish that Peter Watkins had fully understood and accepted what he quotes from Romans 6:1-6, but knowing as I do that he believed sin to be a physical element in the flesh it would make Paul’s explanation of the meaning of baptism a mockery, for the same flesh that goes down into the water returns to the surface. The old-man of physical “sin-in-the-flesh” or “condemned-nature” which he believes in, is not crucified with Christ, the body of sin he and his community believe in is not destroyed; he still believes that he and his community, though having been immersed in water, are still dragging their sinful-flesh feet toward natural death which they believe awaits them as the penalty for their condemned nature.

How can he say, he or they have changed sides when they are still in-Adam? How have they died unto sin if it is still in their flesh? The truth is that sin was never in the physical flesh, neither did God condemn Adam’s flesh. He condemned Adam’s sin; his flesh was as God created it. Adam could not have sinned without law and transgression relates to character not to physical flesh. When a person dies unto sin personified as a Master that Master has no more claim for the person has ceased to exist having died with Christ and has become a new creature - a servant of God and His Son. The responsibility is to God from then on.

But he that despises the Spirit of Grace that has made him a servant is now facing the Second Death having died in baptism symbolically the first judicial death that came by Adam but suffered by Jesus willingly in his place and all imputed in him. Hebrews 10:26-31 explains this and the condemnation of those who tread under foot the Son of God and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, thus despising the Spirit of Grace. Did not the angel state to Mary that the flesh and blood baby would be a Holy Thing called the Son of God? Why then has Peter Watkins and his predecessors judged the nature of Christ as unholy and unclean and must be put to death as a declaration of what was due to this nature and for His own Redemption and cleansing?

Peter Watkins goes on to state that the world that is within us is also called “the flesh” and has to be crucified, then he quotes Galatians 5:24 where Paul says “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.” He then contradicts Paul by stating:

“Disciples must therefore prepare for confrontation with the world on two fronts. They have to crucify, or destroy, their ungodly tendencies.”

This is what Paul says they that are Christ’s have done already. This is proof that Peter Watkins and his supporters do not consider they are Christ’s and have crucified the flesh and its affections and lusts, they still have these ungodly tendencies; baptism has profited them nothing; not having been born again of incorruptible seed by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Peter 1:23).

In order to prove this is the case Paul’s words in part of Romans 7 are used and wrested out of context to make it appear that Paul knew not how to conduct himself as a Christian even though converted to Christ and baptised into His death.

Many have recognised that Paul was either personating a Jew under the Law of Moses or referring to himself in his previous unconverted state as an unregenerated Jew, for it is quite evident that Paul was no longer in a wretched state but could do all things through Christ. We know this to be true for he was one of the greatest examples of faith and followers of Christ and therefore in this regenerated state he could not say of himself “How to do that which is good I find not,” he was the Apostle who said “Be ye followers of me even as I am of Christ.” It is most shocking therefore to read an extract from “The Christadelphian” magazine 1947, a statement by Peter Watkins which states:

“Sin is a product of Adamic flesh and sin after baptism indicates a revival of the Adamic nature which we purported to destroy at baptism. Yet if we are still members of the body of Christ we are still without sin, for “in Him is no sin.” If we are truly in Christ, it is not we that have sinned, but it is the irrepressible Adamic nature which we have been striving to mortify that has obtruded itself - and we heartily deplore the fact. As long as we deplore our transgressions - as long as they are committed despite ourselves and not because of ourselves - we remain in Christ and righteous.”

What a statement following what he says in this booklet about those who have to crucify, or destroy their ungodly tendencies!

“It is not we that have sinned, it is the irrepressible Adamic nature...” “As long as our sins are committed despite ourselves, we are still righteous.” “Even though we commit sin, we remain in Christ, and righteous.”

Now we can see what Peter Watkins believes to be “Substitution;” Jesus has lived as a righteous, sinless man, a martyr to His cause, accepting death on the Cross to destroy sin in His flesh which was obnoxious to God (Clause VIII B.A.S.F.), and God accepts His righteous conduct as the “Substitute” for their sin of which the irrepressible Adamic nature was responsible and which they were committing despite the fact Jesus had proved it was possible not to commit sin, in that same nature or flesh.

Did those Israelites in covenant relationship with God who in the wilderness were bitten by the fiery serpents God sent among them as condemnation of their sin, say “It is not we that

have sinned but the irrepressible Adamic nature has obtruded itself”? No, God showed His displeasure because they were capable of obedience and no more biased to sin than Adam was at creation.

It is Peter Watkins and his predecessors who have instituted this false theory as a legacy from the Apostate Church of Rome. In dealing with the circumstances of the brazen serpent Moses had lifted on a pole we see the lesson clearly that the serpents were instruments of God in the punishment of those who violated His commands and brought death upon themselves. Peter Watkins fails to appreciate that they were already corruptible and would eventually die in any case apart from law, and that this was so with Adam under law and capable of natural death. Therefore when a sinning Israelite bitten by a serpent looked toward its brazen image this signified faith in the word of God and he was saved from inflicted death as per law, even as Adam was, for in fact both would die natural deaths without modification to their nature as living souls of the dust. Therefore Jesus could truly say “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” Why? That all men who look to Him in faith and understanding of the reason for His crucifixion and shed blood might have life from under the death by imputation hanging legally over them on the federal principle taught by Paul in Romans 5.

When Peter Watkins says:

“Although Christ died for us He did not die instead of us,”

he is making a mockery of the Atoning work of Christ and of baptism especially when he says:

“Christ’s followers have to die with Him, this is the meaning of baptism.”

Certainly it is, but it is into His Sacrificial death we are baptised, not into a natural death which all creation is subject to by physical law at creation.

Peter Watkins continues;

“When God pronounced the death sentence on mankind in Eden He was upholding His own righteous law; if He were to waive this sentence he would in effect be saying that sin does not really matter after all. So the sentence stands and God requires that each of us must die.”

It seems then according to Peter Watkins Jesus was wasting His breath when He said of Himself “This is the bread which came down from heaven that a man may eat thereof and not die” (John 6:50,51). Peter Watkins is off the scene and cannot come to an understanding of what death a believer has passed from unto life, but those responsible for sending out PeterWatkins’ booklet should examine themselves whether they be in The Faith and prove their own selves before trying to convert others to a basis of faith compiled of clauses they have never read with understanding and therefore cannot explain.

The false premises and teaching has all revolved around the confusing of natural death with inflicted judicial death for committed sin. There is a parallel in Ezekiel 18 of this very lesson - Adam a son of God under law, and Israel under law in covenant relationship. Both are corruptible. We read in verse 17 that if an Israelite does what God has commanded he

shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. It continues in verse 20 “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” The language here is concerning inflicted judicial death for sin under law and is plain enough to understand. Natural death is a foregone conclusion for righteous and wicked, but verse 21 states “If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed... he shall surely live, he shall not die,” but it is obvious that this same person would die the common death of all human beings. Read how many times the phrase is used, “He shall not die,” and how it is used as pertaining to the death sentence of the Law and not to natural death. Therefore verse 20 has been corrupted and used out of context to ‘prove’ the error that God changed Adam’s nature when he sinned and that previous to sin he was not of a decaying nature subject to death and would not have died if he had not sinned. Yet it is used to disprove belief in the immortality of the soul and to draw attention to Adam a corruptible living soul at creation.

Peter Watkins accepts Paul’s teaching that men are justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus but he nullifies it by insisting that we all contribute and share it. How then can it be free justification? How can it be said that “In due time Christ died for the ungodly”? Where in Scripture does it say He died for Himself? It says in Daniel 9:26 that Messiah would be cut off but not for Himself. And Isaiah explains the reason in his 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter and it says nothing about dying for Himself.

Peter Watkins insists that though he and others have died symbolically by crucifixion with Christ's real death for all, yet it has profited nothing and he states:

“So the sentence of Eden stands and God requires that each of us must die, God has not waived the death sentence.”

In effect then he believes that Christ died in vain. This is not Bible teaching about redemption but his own erroneous concept received by the precepts of men.

I am appalled that a man of his so-called intelligence should use the incident of the Brazen Serpent as being a dramatised parable demonstrating that there was no power in the Law of Moses to save humanity from the serpent bites of sin. In fact there was power in the word of God to Moses to save people from the results of the serpent bites and these serpent bites were not sin - they were imposed of God to condemn sin.

Jesus by His own sinless conduct also condemned sin in the very likeness of the very-good nature in which Adam sinned. Peter Watkins opposes this fact and is incorrect when he poses the question,

“Why does the Lord compare Himself to a serpent of all creatures.”

He doesn’t; He compares Himself in His coming death on the tree, to the lifting up of the Brazen Serpent Moses exhibited for faith and deliverance from inflicted death for sin. It is a lie to say that Jesus inherited from Adam a “serpent nature” which could be tempted to sin, and this nature was the cause of the trouble. God created Adam with a nature that could be tempted to sin and this nature was styled “very good” yet Adam was able to and did sin in that nature; it had nothing to do with a serpent, neither was it cursed, it was sin not nature that was condemned.

And now, because Peter Watkins cannot condemn or curse the character of Jesus he has to find some other way for rejecting Him as a Substitutionary Sacrifice offered up freely for us all. He looked on Him as being cursed on account of serpent nature and that He was cursed by the Law of Moses, not realising that it was the criminal who was slain and hanged on a tree that was cursed of God.

Our sins were laid upon Jesus when He was lifted up. God laid them upon Him and in this way only He became a curse for us, not for Himself. Ye do greatly err not knowing the Scriptures nor the Love of God. It is sad that Peter has died in this error of Roberts, Barling, Norris and others of their creed, but high time those who have been snared by these errors listened to and heeded the warnings that have gone out to them since 1873 for their own good and as a duty to God who so loved that He gave His Son freely for us all; not as an exhibition of what was due to his nature but to pay the debt of life owed to the Edenic Law by giving his own life, free of sin and Adamic federal condemnation, a ransom for all.

God leaves it to us to take advantage of His free Gift of Life Eternal on the true understanding of the Cross and the Bible teaching about redemption not that of men but, as Paul received it by revelation, 1 Corinthians 1:17-19; 2:1-10; and Galatians 1:11,12.

A humble labourer in confident Hope of the Coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

Phil Parry.  
26<sup>th</sup> August 1992