

# Correspondence between Dr. Thomas and Lancelot Burrus 1855

In diverse places in our literature we quote Dr. Thomas's understanding of the Fall in which he states categorically that there was no physical change in the nature of Adam and Eve. We are grateful to a Christadelphian friend for locating an early reference to this in the correspondence section in "The Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come" for July 1855 and which we reproduce below. The first letter is dated May 6, 1855 is from Lancelot Burrus:-

"Doctor John Thomas:- Dear Sir, - I am pleased with your writings, and believe them scriptural. I can say, Sir, you certainly have the law and the testimony on your side.

My friend, Mr. A. Anderson, was kind enough to send me Elpis Israel, which I think is a book of books. You have therein displayed more close study and research than any commentator I have read, either ancient or modern. You have certainly, Sir, brought forth the light out of darkness, though you will not understand me to say that I sanction or agree to every part; for in the propagation of the world I take issue. You will understand me - there is no past nor future with God.

Now, Sir, it seems to me, according to the arrangement that it was impossible to re-people the world without transgression. Consequently, the order of arrangement was made accordingly. My notion is that all creation became corrupt at the fall, even to the elements; and that all created things below man, both animal and vegetable, partook of the nature of the curse; therefore they became corrupt, and propagate.

Again, you say all are raised from the dead: now, I can't exactly say "amen" to that. I don't conceive that the Gentiles have ever had a law since the transgression; therefore, partaking of the nature of Adam, and dying in that state, I can see no necessity for a resurrection. The great apostle to the Gentiles says that both the just and unjust are to be raised. Well, I agree very well to that; but, I think a man must lay claim to something that does not belong to him, to make him "unjust," or, at any rate, that which he is not entitled to. Well now, Sir, let us look around us, and we find about eight hundred sects, all claiming an interest in the blood of Christ; and according to the law and the testimony, not one is right. They, I consider, are the unjust ones, and will be raised in order to their justification, could they do it. But no; they are doomed to the second death. I think you leave your readers rather in the dark as regards the creation of systems of worlds, filling eternity, filling immensity, and co-eternal with the great God who fills all, and in all; and those systems of worlds being perfected and going to perfection forever and ever.

I am not in the habit of scribbling my notions, and you will find they are not made quite so plain as might be to suit many; but, Sir, I know a hint to you is enough to understand what I mean, or the idea intended to be conveyed.

You certainly, Sir, have sealed the mouth of the Great Supervisor upon David's throne, and the promises of the fathers, the Coming of the Lord, the Settling of Palestine, etc., etc.

Can you possibly believe that he believes what he pretends to teach? Don't you think sinister motives have their influence? Well, my dear Sir, on the day of reckoning we shall find who will be justified, and who will not.

You will accept assurances of regard from

Lancelot Burrus. Orange Co. Virginia. U.S.A.

## **Dr. Thomas replied as follows:**

Our Terrestrial System Before The Fall. Our friend says, that his notion is that all creation became corrupt at the fall, even to the elements. This is the general idea. Moses tells us very plainly, that when the terrestrial system was completed on the Sixth Day, that God reviewed all that He had made, and pronounced it "very good." But, in what sense was it very good? In an animal and physical sense; for it was a natural and animal system, not a spiritual one. Such a system is essentially one of waste and reproduction; and was organized with reference to what God knew would come to pass. This is implied in the placing of the earth in such a position with respect to the sun, moon, and stars, that there should be a diversity of seasons, etc. Thus, fall and winter, seasons of decay and death, were institutions existing before the Fall; and presented to Adam and Eve phenomena illustrative of the existence in the physical system of a principle of corruption, the extent of which, however, they might not have been fully apprized of.

Death and corruption then, with reproduction, the characteristic of spring and summer, is the fundamental law of the physical system of the Six Days. Adam and Eve, and all the other animals born of the earth with themselves, would have died and gone to corruption, if there had been no transgression, provided that there had been no further interference with the physical system than Moses records in his history of the Six Days.

Let us, by way of illustration, confine our attention to the two animals at the head of animated nature, called Adam and Eve. Concerning them, it may be inquired, If they would have died under the proviso above stated, how can Paul's saying be true, 'that Death entered into the world by sin'? True; the death principle was an essential property of their nature; but as they did not die till after their transgression, death did not enter in till after that event. But, the inquirer means, "If they would have died anyhow under the proviso, how can death be said to be the consequence of sin?" Death is not the consequence of sin, sin being the original physical cause - but the physical consequence of a moral act. If thou doest thus and so, "dying thou shalt die;" but just reverse this saying, and let it read, "If thou doest thus and so, "dying thou shalt not die." Here are moral acts with diverse physical results. Now, if these results are ordained upon two essentially dying creatures, because animal creatures, what is implied? Why, that in the one case the dying process shall not be interrupted, and therefore death would follow; while in the other, the process should be interrupted, and therefore life should be established. In the former case, all that would be necessary would be to let things take their natural course; but in the latter, this would not do; and therefore it would be necessary to bring into play a transforming force which should change the very good animal nature into a very good spiritual, or incorruptible nature, which latter formed no part of the system of the Six Days.

Now, these conditions were fulfilled by the arrangements in Paradise, where sin first made its appearance. There were there two trees; the one styled "the Tree of Lives;" the other, "the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil;" and which, because of the penalty attached to the eating of its fruit, may be styled "the Tree of Deaths." The lives and the deaths of Adam and Eve were predicated, not upon any peculiarity of their animal constitution, but upon the relations they might come to sustain to those two trees in Paradise. Moses has given us the history of their case, and from this we learn that they placed themselves under the law which sentenced them to death by eating of the fruit they were commanded not to eat. Now, all that was necessary for this sentence to take effect was just to allow the laws of the animal economy to take their course, and the result would be death and corruption, or a return to the dust from whence they were taken.

But, the inquirer wants to know, Suppose they had lived in the obedience of faith all the time that might have been appointed for their probation in Paradise, would they not have died? Certainly they would, if there had been no arrangement divinely interposed to prevent death. This arrangement existed in connection with the Tree of Lives. We learn from the Mosaic account that the eating of that tree would impart immortality or deathlessness; for we are told that they were expelled from Paradise that they might not eat of that tree and live for ever. It is certain, therefore, that the animal nature they

possessed was essentially a mortal nature, and required to be physically operated upon by the power transmissible through contact with the Tree of Lives to change it into a nature constitutionally capable of enduring forever; which the animal nature is not.

We have an illustration of what would have happened to Adam and Eve if they had continued in the obedience of faith, in what we are taught is to occur in the case of the obedient believers belonging to the generation contemporary with the appearing of the Lord Jesus in power and great glory. These, designated by Paul as “we who are alive and remain,” he declares “shall not sleep, but shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” This was not revealed till he communicated it; for he styles it “a mystery,” or secret, which, says he, “Behold, I show you.” Here then, are persons found living in the obedience of faith at the Lord’s appearing. Everyone admits that they are constitutionally animal and mortal, though, it is revealed, that they should not die, if they be of the living remnant contemporary with His appearing. Their not dying is conditional, as in the case of Adam and Eve - if they be found in the obedience of faith, and if contemporaries of the advent; otherwise not. But in not dying into death, as with Enoch and Elijah, the dying process which commences with birth must be interrupted and terminated by the inter- position of divine power; even by that power that rebuilds the bodies of the dead upon new physical principles; in other words, by the Spirit of God that would have changed the eaters of the Tree of Lives in Eden; that raised up the mortal body of Jesus; and that will raise up and change the saints by Jesus, when in their case “mortality shall be swallowed up of life.”

There was no miracle wrought in executing the sentence under which Adam and Eve placed themselves. That is to say, there was no new physical principle infused into their nature that was not there before they transgressed.

The introduction of miracle would have been in the instantaneous transformation of their mortal animal nature into the immortal spiritual nature on their eating of the fruit of the Tree of Lives. But there was no scope for the exercise of extraordinary power; for it is only obedience that gains access to that tree, whether in the Paradise of Eden, or in the Kingdom of God. If they had continued obedient, death, though lurking within them, would not have been allowed to enter into the world; it would have had no victims; but they transgressed - their thinking became perverse, or contrary to the letter of the Word of God, and their practice like it, - they sinned; and the physical tendency of animal nature to dissolution became “the law of sin and death” within them, because its abolition was prevented on account of sin.

From these premises it will be seen, that we dissent from our correspondent’s notion that all creation became corrupt (by which we understand him to mean, constitutionally impregnated with corruptibility) at the Fall. We believe that the change consequent upon that calamity was moral, not physical. The natural system was the same the day before the Fall as the day after. A palace, though destructible by time or any other cause, may nevertheless be “very good” when its building is completed: so also our terrestrial system, though susceptible of deterioration, was physically “very good” after its kind. Adam and Eve were innocent and undefiled but without character. They became immoral; and the practice of vice has made their descendants what we see.”

Resurrection Not Universal. Our friend in Orange is under a mistake in supposing that we maintain that the resurrection of every man, woman, and child of Adam’s posterity, is the doctrine of Scripture, His words are, “You say, all are raised from the dead; now I can’t exactly say ‘amen’ to that.” Nor can we. We believe, that the Scriptures teach the resurrection of the just and of the unjust who have died under times of knowledge, whose knowledge they have accepted: and the resurrection, a thousand years afterwards, of “the rest of the dead” who have intelligently rejected it. Of the former were the contemporaries of the Lord Jesus who lived under the times of the law. To some of them he said, “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves cast out.” This testimony proves, that when the Kingdom of God is established, these victims of despair will be there; and secondly, like Adam and Eve from Paradise, they will be expelled from it; so that, while Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

all the prophets and the saints, will be permitted to eat of the Tree of Life, they will be driven forth to misery and death. Besides these unjust there will be those who, placing themselves under law to Christ, run well for a time, but become weary of well-doing, and turn like washed hogs to their wallowing in the mire. These all rise from the dead at the coming of the Lord to receive according to their demerits. The rest of the dead are those who never came under a constitution of righteousness; not because they did not know how, but because they refused to do so. Having been enlightened, but preferring darkness to light, they will arise to judgment at the end of the millennium.

Besides these three enlightened classes, there is a fourth which returns to the dust forevermore. This class is very large, and consists of all whom God from whatever cause has left in helpless ignorance. He is not a hard master reaping where he hath not sowed, and gathering where he hath not scattered. Men who do not come to the knowledge of the truth, not because they will not, but because they cannot, are like the old Athenians under "times of ignorance which God winks at." He winks at their ignorance in not raising them to judgment as the others. But though not raised to judgment, neither are they raised to life, or saved in any sense; for "they are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them."

Though I do not pretend to define the boundary line between "times of ignorance" and "times of knowledge," I am very much inclined to conclude that the "eight hundred sects" our correspondent classifies as the unjust, may belong to the "times of ignorance," and be winked at as the old Athenian idolaters were. They are "sinners of the Gentiles," very pious in their way, well-intentioned, and fair-spoken; but still ignorant of the truth, and hopelessly so, because of the blinding effect of the several Gentilisms imposed upon them by their tutors and guardians. They believe their systems to be God's, and they have a zeal for them as though they were embodiments of the truth. But alas! No mistake could be greater or more fatal. As our correspondent says, "according to the law and the testimony, not one is right;" and it is by this testimony all things are to be adjudicated when the Lord appears. As Paul said of Jews and Gentiles in his day, so we may truly affirm of the pious sectarians of ours, "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth... they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Paul's contemporaries may have deemed him to be very uncharitable in speaking thus; but he regarded that no more than we; he declared the truth of the matter, which is now as thoroughly reproduced as if no interval or change had elapsed since he wrote. The "eight hundred sects" neither believe, preach, nor practice the things taught and commanded by Jesus and his apostles. Let a man acquaint himself with these, and proclaim them to either of "the orthodox four," not to mention the others, and he would find that if they heard him once, they would not repeat the "indiscretion" a second time. "There is none that understandeth, they have all gone out of the way;" and there is none but God that can divorce them from their traditions, and translate them into light. If He do it not, their case is hopeless. They cannot deliver themselves, for they are bound hand and foot by their systems "as they happen to be led." Shall such born-slaves of human folly, trained into it by scholasticism while their minds were incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong, or the false and the true, "made subject to vanity not willingly," - shall such be raised from the dead that their "hidden things may be Judged according to Paul's gospel? Can they be regarded as under times of knowledge? I should think not; for Isaiah teaches us, that when Jerusalem shall arise and shine, because her light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon her, "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people." This is the condition of all "Christendom" at the present time; as all must perceive who understand the truth. The clergy teach the people to consider this century as gloriously enlightened! O foolish and blind! If the nineteenth be light, what must the first have been! Compare the two and note the difference. The "eight hundred sects," the farthing rushlights of today through which its glory blazes, were unknown to the apostles and their brethren; who were, nevertheless, "light in the Lord," and "shone as lights in the world." Where is that pre-existing non-sectarian light? Who knows? Not one of them; for by their flickering rushlights they cannot pierce the gloom; their eyes are blinded, and they cannot see, however bright the true light might burn before them.

It is most charitable to hope that they may not be held responsible; but, as there is no eternal life in the Kingdom of God but through the obedience of faith, and as they have all wandered off and lost

the way, that they may “remain in the congregation of the dead,” upon whom the sentence rests, saying, “they are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise; for thou hast visited and destroyed them, and caused all the memory of them to perish” - Isaiah 26. There are no scripturally recognized substitutes for the truth and its obedience. If men honestly desire salvation, let them seek these with their whole heart. Gentilism in whole or in part, can save no man. It is mere rhantized mythology, perversive of the truth. Let us be contented with “the simplicity of Christ” unadulterated in the apostolic and prophetic word; and pray earnestly for his return, that all sects may be abolished in the enlightenment of their adherents; and that henceforth, in returning to the dust, they may die in the Lord, and their works follow them to a resurrection unto life at the end of the Millennial Reign.

Dr. Thomas.