

*Letter to John Carter in reference to a book reviewed in "The Christadelphian" entitled*

## **"WHY CHRIST DIED"**

Dear John Carter,

Three issues of The Christadelphian provide conclusive evidence that your obstinate refusal to face up to facts and correct the errors of your predecessors is driving many Christadelphians into a position where they must either cease entirely to exercise their reason or abandon vital Scriptural truth.

This new book by J. Hargrave James, from a Christadelphian, is an amazing production. No doubt it presents you with problems, but it is exactly what we warned you of five years ago. No thoughtful person can long be satisfied with the assertion that the chief purpose of Christ's death was to destroy His sin-stricken body, but being debarred by an almost insane dread of the term "substitution" from accepting it as a true sacrifice, they are being forced either to mental insincerity or to adopt the only alternative, the conclusion that it was no more than a case of martyrdom. This is what Mr James has done, and until Christadelphians abandon the 9th of the 39 Articles, that sin is a fixed principle of the flesh, and accept the simple Scriptural truth that *Alienation is a matter of Law and not of physical nature*, it will be impossible for them to understand how the Atonement reveals the Love and Justice of God.

A sentence in your Editorial condemnation of this book (November, page 167) indicates that you are at least conscious of a fact we have often been blamed for remarking. You describe Mr James's theory in the following words, "*it is) a view which is not Christadelphian, neither in our judgment is it Biblical.*" We fully agree that it is not Biblical, but presumably from your standpoint if this book had been true Christadelphianism it would not have mattered so much that it was not Biblical. It is a naive admission.

In your article on Galatians in the October issue (p. 141) you produce a typically Christadelphianism, saying, "*It is declared that Jesus was accursed.*" Without feeling called upon to follow you into the tortuous paths which bring you to this confessedly "startling" conclusion, we challenge it as a wicked wresting of Scripture to uphold a false hypothesis. The Apostle Paul says, "*Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed*" (1 Corinthians 12:3). In contradicting so clear a statement you convict yourself of preaching another Gospel than Paul's. Your arguments have been fully answered in "Life by Law and by Grace," by F.C.Maycock, who left the West Hendon ecclesia and your fellowship on account of these very matters. Why do you not utilize some of your space to explain the discrepancies between what you are now printing in The Christadelphian and what Dr Thomas said on the subject? Jesus was made a curse for us (a very different thing from calling Him accursed) when He suffered on Calvary the death due to sinners. You may think you can distinguish between "for us" and "instead of us" but until you can show that Jesus deserved the awful things He suffered, you are fighting a losing battle.

We are neither afraid nor ashamed to confess that we believe that our Saviour loved us and gave himself for us; your contention that He was Himself in the same condemnation will not do. It is not because we are human nature that we need redemption, but because we are sinners. He was exactly the same nature as we, but as He did no sin He was not a sinner and

His death could not have been in any sense for Himself or on His own account. How is it that you persist in making these terrible accusations when you cannot produce a single passage of Scripture which plainly supports them?

We read that He died for our sins (Galatians 1:4), for our transgressions, our iniquities (Isaiah 53), that He bore the sins of many, that He gave His life for the sheep (John 10). He was delivered for our offences (Romans 4:25), was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:9), that He who was rich for our sakes became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9), that He purged our sins (Hebrews 2:3), that He tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9), that He suffered for us, the just for the unjust (1 Peter). When you can find, to put against these and many similar texts, a single one which says either that He died for Himself or was included amongst those for whom He died, or that He needed redemption, or that He was a constitutional sinner or had sin in His nature, then we may admit your right to talk about His “taking away the curse for Himself and for us.” As we know you never can do so, we believe you are a traducer and an enemy of the truth who is leading more and more, like Mr James, into apostasy or unbelief.

In December you bring to your aid a review by A.D. Norris. He describes Mr James’s book as “a terrible weakening” of Scripture testimonies and he implores the author to hold back the remaining copies of his book and reflect! We say, physician heal thyself! How has Mr Norris remedied the deficiencies he deplors? He says (page 171):

*“in addition (to Mr James’s view) the death of Jesus displayed –*

*(i) His own consciousness of the proper end of that which is ‘not good,’*

*(ii) the true self-abnegation of any who would, in baptism, join Him on the Cross that their own sinful inclinations might be shamed and slain there, and*

*(iii) the love of God Who was willing so to incline to sinners as to send and strengthen His Son to this bitter and shameful death and redeem them so ‘with His own blood.’”*

What does this pontifical deliverance amount to when reduced to ordinary language?

Point (ii) is nothing more than stilted rhetoric.

Point (iii) certainly adds nothing to our understanding of why Christ died.

Point (i) is simply the old tale, that the crucifixion was for the purpose of destroying Christ’s sin-defiled body, cunningly wrapt to conceal its ugly outlines.

Jesus truly disclaimed the arrogated title “Good Master,” not because He had an evil nature but, and because He had a higher claim to goodness (John 14:9).

Mr James is quite right in holding that the murder of Jesus was the basest crime in human history, and you, John Carter, and all who think with you are implicated in that crime, because you maintain that it was right and proper for Him to die. You printed in May 1946, the awful judgment “there was no violation of justice in His death. It was not wrong for Him to die” (W.F.Barling). It is no wonder that Mr James has written a book renouncing such infamous statements and advocating the view of the modernists that it was purely a martyrdom, or in his own words, “God determined that He must experience what other men

had to experience in their conflict against sin” (Why Christ Died, page 87). He has renounced the horrible idea so glibly advanced by Mr Norris, so crudely by Mr Barling, that the innocent Son of God was required to submit to that degrading punishment because of the uncleanness of His nature, but the pity is he has failed to perceive that it is the supposed reason for God requiring His death which is obnoxious, not the fact of His death. If Mr James can see wisdom in God permitting evil men to crucify Jesus “in order that He might understand the trials which others have to face,” how much more should he see not only wisdom, but also mercy and love in God permitting those evil men to do to Jesus in our stead what might more justly have been done to us? God did not punish Jesus for His nature nor did He inflict punishment upon Him instead of us. Jesus voluntarily went to a death which He could have avoided, in the knowledge that He was thereby carrying out the pre-determined purpose of God to buy man back from the dominion of sin by the payment of the debt, of life, incurred in Eden.

In January you printed a criticism of the book by Mr Green, who says (page 5) “*it is admitted on page 61 and 80 that sin is a Scriptural designation of the nature of man, including Christ, that He bore it in His own body on the tree.*” This admission by Mr James accounts for the failure of his book to give an answer to the question “Why Christ Died,” and we challenge both him and his critic to produce evidence that the nature of man is ever designated in Scripture as sin. Many people are firmly convinced that it is so, just as many people believe that the soul is designated as immortal, but they are mistaken. Sin is defined for us in 1 John 3:4 as transgression of law; in a few places it means sin-offering; it is never used as a synonym for human nature. Christ was human nature; He was not sin. He became a sin-bearer in exactly the same way as the sacrificial lamb under the law became a sin-bearer, i.e., by suffering the penalty due to the sinner by whom it was offered. He bore our sins in His own body to the tree when the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, in the same sense as the scape-goat carried in its body into the wilderness the sins confessed over its head by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. He was made sin for us when on Calvary He was treated as if He were guilty of sin and surrendered by His Father to the power of evil as if He had been the personification of the whole load of sin and wickedness committed by mankind from Eden onwards. But He Himself was ever holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners morally and physically; in Him personally was no sin; He never forfeited the Sonship and harmony with His Father which belonged to Him by birth.

Mr Green says also “*if He had clung to life indefinitely, the diabolos would have conquered through natural decay (the wages of sin is death) and moreover there would have been no redemption from the curses of Adam and Moses.*” Natural decay is not the wages of sin. We know this sounds dreadful to Christadelphian ears, but bloodshedding, sacrifice, the law, the Cross and the second death point to a judicial death as the true wages of sin. In the mercy of God, those who accept Christ are only required to submit to it in the symbol of baptism, because He voluntarily suffered the reality on their behalf. Certainly, if Jesus had clung to life there would have been no redemption, but that diabolos would then have conquered Him is unproved and unprovable. On the contrary, since it is affirmed that He counted it not robbery to be equal with God, we conclude that had He not for the purpose of redeeming mankind determined to be obedient unto death, He would still have retained the position to which He was born, and the question then arises, what dominion has death or diabolos over a Son of God?

So that while you, with the doubtful assistance of Mr Norris and Mr Green, are united in condemning Mr James's mistakes, you are each guilty of far worse. He refuses to attribute to God the injustice of encompassing the death of His own innocent and holy Son, and all right-minded people must agree with him thus far. You three do not hesitate to charge God with the responsibility for bringing forth a Son with a defiled and sinful nature and inflicting upon Him the torture of a criminals death in order to show Divine justice! All four of you agree in robbing Christ of His honour by the assertion that the reason He was begotten by God was to endow him with the strength to overcome sin which we lack! Could you bring yourselves to consider the possibility that God neither desired nor found any pleasure in the death of His beloved Son; but that He permitted the commission of that "basest crime in history," which He foresaw from the beginning, and which He suffered in an intenser form the pangs which would be felt by any father in such circumstances, as a sacrifice provided by Himself for our redemption? Jesus' part in it was that knowing what was required to fulfil the purpose originating in Eden, He freely and of His own choice fitted Himself into the redemptive plan, fought temptation and weakness by the exercise of His own will, and finally gave up His own life to pay the bankrupt sinner's debt.

Doomed as it was from the start by his supposition that when first created man was physically and morally superior to what he is now and therefore incapable of experiencing temptation from within himself, we cannot see sufficient divergence in Mr James's book to warrant your animadversions. Could it be that his fault is that the book does not issue from Birmingham and brings no profit to The Christadelphian? If there is any substantial doctrinal difference between him and you, you and your contributors have quite failed to show where it lies. All he has done is to reason logically from your false premises and prove that ultimately they lead to the rejection of fundamental Biblical truths and reduce the world's most stupendous act of self-sacrificing love into an everyday tragedy. It is probable that Mr James himself does not yet realize what he has unintentionally accomplished, but you no doubt can see the chasm opening at your feet.

Ernest Brady (1957)