

Ernest Brady
to
Richard Mellowes

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A Reply to “The Testimony” Magazine

Dear Richard Mellowes,

During the past year or so I have read one or two articles written by you and if I may say so have formed a generally favourable opinion of your writing but I am truly astonished by the rubbish you offer in the December 1984 Issue of The Testimony under the heading “Christ’s Sacrifice and God’s Righteousness.” In this your stated intention is to explain how the righteousness of God was declared through the shedding of Christ’s blood. The purpose of this letter to you is to point out to you and your readers that upon your exposition of the matter you achieve the very opposite of what you set out to do – you prove, if what you say is true, that the death of Christ was not a sacrifice in any sense whatsoever and that what happened to Him declared God’s UNrighteousness. I shall demonstrate this and show you from your own words where and why you go so hopelessly wrong.

Referring to Eden you say,

“Through disobedience... many were made sinners, and thus all men including ourselves have at some time by our actions and lack of faith declared God to be a liar.”

This simply is not true. All men have not either by actions or lack of faith declared God to be a liar. Jesus was a man and when did He ever declare God to be a liar by actions or lack of faith? And Jesus is not the only one of whom this can be said. There are a significant number named in Scripture as Holy, perfect, righteous, blameless. I am unable to affirm that they never committed a sin but neither can you affirm that they did; I accept what the Bible says of them. Do you ever think of a certain priest and his wife Elizabeth, that “they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless”? Do you ever think of Jesus’ mother – “My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour; for He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” Have you ever thought to ask yourself if and where and when Mary, by action or lack of faith declared God to be a liar? You must have a very strange compartmentalised mind to be able to read of these and many others “Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions... out of weakness were made strong... of whom the world was not worthy” and at the same time entertain the belief that all men including ourselves have at some time by our actions and lack of faith declared God to be a liar. I regret to have to say it, Richard, but it is you who declare God to be a liar because He has said that some have been holy, obedient and full of faith. You have plenty of plausible language but you are singularly short on discrimination. You quote a lot of Scripture but you do not rightly divide it. When you quote the words of the Apostle Paul translated to us as “For all have sinned,” he is not making a statement implying as you say “the universal sinfulness of man;” he is laying down a general principle under which an imperfect creation can be raised to immortal perfection by the exercise of individual faith. In this, all the children of Adam come under the Constitution of Sin; this does not mean that they are necessarily personally sinful; it means that to attain to eternal life they need redemption. Your own simple commonsense

ought to tell you that universal sinfulness is wrong, if only for the one exception of Jesus. Was He a man? Yes. Was He sinful? No. Ergo your basic premise is false.

You commence by asking the question “How precisely did the shedding of Christ’s blood declare the righteousness of God?” and it appears to me that the answer which ought to be evident to many Bible-reader lies in the implications of the law of sacrifice which has so large a place in the education of Israel. It may not be immediately apparent why God chose to associate atonement and forgiveness of sins with blood-shedding but clearly it is so and it is to that we must look for the answer. Christ’s death is everywhere spoken of as a sacrifice; “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” You may like it or not, you may understand it or not but no one can possibly deny that under the law a repentant sinner could only obtain forgiveness by making the appropriate offering; a ritual in which the most important conditions for acceptability were that the offering had to be perfect of its kind and it had to be the property of the offerer. This did two things; it required in the offerer a recognition of his need for redemption and it upheld the Divine decree that the wages of sin is death and at the same time it showed God to be a merciful loving Father. In both aspects, by the sacrifice of an innocent creature God’s righteousness was declared because the sacrifice was a demonstration of what sin deserved and yet His willingness to save sinners. It seems very simple and it is most certainly scriptural so why can you not accept it? I can see the point of the objection some people have that it is unjust to kill an innocent harmless creature in order to obtain forgiveness but not all people are moved in the same way when we kill or permit killing to obtain a lamb-chop for our dinner. No one likes the idea of bloodshedding and on that account some are vegetarians, but most people feel that the satisfaction of our need to eat to live overrides our scruples. In the same way our need for redemption if we are to have life more abundant outweighs our natural repugnance to taking life. I find it astonishing that you as a Christadelphian reject the true meaning of sacrifice almost completely. Except in the title the very word scarcely appears in your article and of the principle it establishes, that Christ voluntarily laid down His life to meet the law of sin and death and purchase us back to God at the price of His own life there is never a suggestion.

So as a Christadelphian you reject sacrifice, on the grounds that it really implies that God chose to punish an innocent victim in order to spare the guilty. You say this amounts to substitution and there is a sense in which this is perfectly true, but you overlook the one fact which changes the whole picture. It would be a valid objection to animal sacrifice if the victim was a sentient reasoning creature with an understanding of law and justice and supposing it had an awareness that its life was being taken for a purpose of which it had no knowledge. And if Jesus’ life had been taken from Him or required of Him by God because of His sinful nature your objection would be justified. But it was not. Jesus was under no constraint beyond His determination to do the will of His Father to save mankind from perishing. Jesus was free to choose - He could voluntarily pay the price of our redemption with His own life or He could have claimed His right to life without doing so. This is why His was a true sacrifice. Surely before you spurn it you would be wiser to look for the meaning and principle underlying it and not consign to the rubbish-bin most of what has been written for our learning.

You pose the question and then write that the answer must be presented in a series of logically progressive stages. This sounds very promising and suggests that you are able to present a rational explanation of what you really believe to be reason for which Christ died. Let us examine it?

“Firstly (you write) we note that Christ’s shed blood was the blood of a righteous man.”

No one could possibly quarrel with that. You go on,

“We know that the life is in the blood.”

Again no one could disagree - but the one is not a logical progression from the other; you cannot reason from the fact that Christ’s was the blood of a righteous man to the deduction that the life was in the blood nor the other way round. Thirdly you say “But Christ had not earned death; he had done

nothing to merit having His life poured out.” Exactly so, but where is the logical progressive reasoning in this? There is none. All you have done is to bring together three disparate statements of scriptural fact, all true but having no causal relationship each to each, and in fact between your firstly, that Christ was a righteous man and your thirdly, that He had not earned death you have no logical connection whatsoever but instead a yawning chasm which you cannot bridge. What you have is a complete reversal of what one would naturally expect. For if He was righteous and had not earned death the obvious deduction is that He ought not to have died. For you to interpose the fact that the life is in the blood adds nothing and explains nothing - it is simply a bit of fudge. So we have followed your three stages of what you are pleased to call a logical progression and all we have got is a complete contradiction of what you are arguing and of what in natural justice one would expect. The three facts you cite are undoubtedly true but you have no logical connection between them and the only conclusion to be drawn so far is the precise opposite of what you are advancing; for if God required or brought about the death of an innocent man then God was UNrighteous. There is no escape. You make your position clear on page 391 in these words, “because of His sinless life the wrath of God was appeased in Him.” Now if as you say the wrath of God was appeased because of His sinless life, since He did indeed live a sinless life why did He have to suffer death? Cannot you see the stupidity of your so-called reasoning and the glaring contradiction? If God is appeased He is appeased and justice, human or Divine could not countenance the infliction of a cruel violent death in any circumstances whatsoever. So far then your reasoning has produced nothing whatever by way of explanation of why Christ died and all you have proved, if you have proved anything apart from your own confusion, is that if God required the death of His Son or brought it about, then God was unrighteous and unjust.

Well, of course this was not where you intended going so now you have to refer to your map, which is Robert Roberts Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith. You say,

“One reason for this unearned death was that He was made of sinful flesh.”

You do not make it clear whether you intend this as a fourth stage in your reasoning, but it is neither logical nor a progression and it is different from your first three in that it is not a scriptural truth as I have shewn earlier but simply the widely held apostate dogma of Original Sin which Christadelphians share with nearly all the denominations of Christendom. When you state that Christ was a righteous man; that the life is in the blood but that Christ had not earned death you are correct because the Scriptures tell us these things, but when you assert that He was made of sinful flesh you are wrong because there is no such thing. You are simply asserting a Christadelphianism for which there is not only no proof but the very contrary as the Apostle says “I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.” And when you write “One reason for this unearned death was...” you imply that there are other reasons as well as sinful flesh. Do you really think there are or is this just a little more fudge?

I am fortunate enough to be able to tell you the reasons for Christ’s unearned death - and neither of them has anything to do with sinful flesh. It was because “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” That was the reason from God’s point of view - a giving to us, not a taking from Him. From man’s point of view, in the words of Peter, “The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our Fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus, whom ye delivered up and denied him in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let him go; but ye denied the holy one and the just and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the prince of life.”

This was not God requiring the destruction of sinful flesh - it was a foul and wicked murder committed by evil envious men enraged by His goodness and His status. “This is the heir - come let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours.” And you Christadelphians are doing the very same thing today. As Fred Barling wrote a few years ago, you believe there was no injustice in His death; it was right for Him to die. And you say the same today – “In pouring out His life’s blood, though sinless,

Jesus publicly declared to all men that God's condemnation of sinful flesh was Just. Sinful flesh deserved to die."

I suggest you try to apply your reasoning in the form of a syllogism, thus,

Jesus was sinful flesh.

Sinful flesh deserved to die.

Therefore Jesus deserved to die.

Can you really bear to think this; because this is what you are saying? If Jesus deserved to die how could His death have been in any sense a sacrifice? It would be as if an Israelite had brought to a priest for his offering a mangy cat or a dead dog and expect it to be acceptable.

To call your attempt a series of logically progressive stages is ludicrous in the extreme. In effect what you have done is to stuff an old bag with straw, dress it up in a few cast-of clothes and stand back and say "Look brethren, at this splendid figure." Lots of them may be deceived by your plausibility, but I am sure that some will know in their hearts that what they are seeing is really only the same old pitiful scarecrow set up by R.Roberts a hundred years ago. I fear that you Christadelphians in South Wales are a contemptible lot of people. You had F.J.Pearce amongst you for many years, putting forth the truth, type-set and printed on his little, hand machine, showing that flesh was never changed, that we and all men are the same flesh as was created very good in the beginning; that the difference between Jesus and ourselves is that He was the Son of God and we are the children of Adam and it was this fact which enabled Him to redeem us by the forfeit of His own life; but being only a miner and a bit short on literacy and polish you despised and rejected him, like your predecessive counterparts the Scribes and Pharisees. So much the worse for you.

On your view that the principle behind the sacrifice of Christ was that His flesh deserved destruction and that God required that He be put to death because of the sin inherited from Adam, your effort was doomed before it began because as I have shewn this would prove the very opposite of what you wish to say; it would prove God to be utterly unrighteous and unjust. On what principle of law, whether it be human or divine dare you affirm that it could be right to condemn - and not only condemn but punish with death a person for what he is irrespective of what he does? I invite you to think about it again. If we are created sinful nature by God - and I think we are agreed that we did not create ourselves nor even make ourselves sinful by nature - how could God possibly hold us guilty of being what He made us? He is undoubtedly supreme and it has to be admitted that if He chose to act in this way there is nothing we could do about it, but in that case we could hardly respect His wisdom. But He invites us to look at His dealings with mankind and test them, on the basis of our own instinctive knowledge of what is just and fair. "Oh house of Israel, are not my ways equal?" "I pray you, judge betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" You Christadelphians confidently reply, "No, Lord; your ways are not quite equal because you caused us to be born with sinful flesh so that we cannot help being sinners. We have discovered that you did not plant your vineyard with the choicest vine but actually with diseased and rotten stock fit only for destruction." You would not put it quite so bluntly but this is what you are saying. The prophet said, "the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father," and this is a basic principle of all justice. Yet you completely reverse it and declare that every man woman and child bears in his defiled flesh the iniquity of Adam, for you say (page 391), "It was this sinful flesh that since Eden has been condemned to die." Again, Isaiah says "When the son has done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes and hath done them, he shall surely live." But in respect of Jesus, you say the exact opposite - that when He had done all which is lawful and right, God says He shall surely die. Why should He die? You say He had to die because He was brought into the world with sinful flesh; if you can see any way in which this declares God's righteousness you have a very queer mind.

You belong to a community proud of its reputation as Bible readers but in this context at least you appear to pay more respect to the writings of John Thomas and Robert Roberts and the Editors

who followed them than to some of the Apostles and Prophets. I want to remind you of the warning of Isaiah which seems to me to be very apposite. "Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." This is exactly what you are doing in this shameful piece of work; you reverse the truth and turn the facts upside down to fit your false premises; you charge God with a degree of malevolence which we should regard with contempt in even the most primitive demagogue. Even Job's poor comforters had more sense than you. "Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert Justice?" Elihu has a message for you. "Hearken unto me, ye men of understanding (he could have said ye Associate Editors of The Testimony) far be it from God that He should do wickedness and from the Almighty that He should commit iniquity... yea surely, God will not do wickedly neither will the Almighty pervert judgment."

Reading your work and your colleagues I have come to the conclusion that you have all become too clever. The basic fact of the Gospel, that Christ died for the ungodly is a truth which the simplest soul can grasp; but it is a bit too simple for you. Self-sacrifice has an appeal which nearly every Christian sect recognizes, even when they are grievously mistaken on many important things; but you have eliminated it and put in its stead "the putting to death of sinful flesh, in the body of Christ, after a perfect life, (which) constituted the condemnation and slaughter of our condemned nature." The supreme sadness of the Christadelphian position is that you have so much understanding of the purpose and working of God and yet are completely blind and ignorant of the central doctrine of salvation. Who shall you blame but yourselves? "For ye have perverted the words of the Living God, of the Lord of Hosts our God."

The principle of sacrifice was introduced to our first parents in Eden and developed in the Law of Moses; its purpose is to reveal God to man and to call forth that faith by which He is honoured. In making an offering in which the Life of an animal was taken by bloodshedding the sinner acknowledged his guilt and recognized that he could only be saved by God's mercy. But such sacrifices were only a teaching process or object lesson; they could not give final deliverance because the life of an animal was not a true equivalent of the life of a man. The life which had been lost by sin could only be redeemed by a human life. No son of Adam could give his life as a ransom, since the life of every child of Adam is a continuation of the life which was forfeited by disobedience, and thus death as a deferred penal hangs over the human race, therefore it is evident that man could only be saved from extinction by a man whose life was not derived by natural descent from Adam, who was not himself a sinner and who was free and voluntarily prepared to sacrifice himself. This explains Jesus. As Mary's child He was the same flesh and blood as all of us, of exactly the same corruptible nature, capable of suffering and temptation, but as Son of God His life came to Him direct and not by the will of man. By His living experience, Jesus proved that human nature is not in any way defective, as you maintain, and showed by His example that obedience to God's commandments is possible, but when we examine ourselves we have to confess that we are sinners. This is where the federal principle is so vital. In order that mercy might prevail and one redemptive sacrifice suffice to redeem a multitude of people, God regards all Adam's descendants as having lost their life in his life and become alienated with him. This is how mankind is born in Sin, in the bondage into which we are sold.

When Jesus allowed Himself to be impaled on the Cross and refused to call the legions of angels to deliver Him as He could have done He knew what He was doing. He was submitting to a penalty He did not deserve and a condemnation which was utterly unjust, in order to cancel, by the surrender of His own life, the debt owed by sinners. This was the bitter cup His Father set before Him in Gethsemane and in the following hours He drained it to the dregs. Upon the Cross He paid the debt owed by sinners. Had that death been inflicted when it was incurred upon our first parents, the human race would never have been, so we all owe our very existence to the transaction planned in Eden and settled at Calvary.

Poor Richard Mellows! I cannot help wondering what you do with your mind when you read the words of the Apostle Peter at Pentecost; "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a

man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs (approved of God, not condemned of God) ye have taken (ye men of Israel, not God) and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” When you read these words how can you sit down and write as you do? How do you transfer the guilt from those wicked hands to the hands of God? You do so because you misconceive how and why in His determinate counsel and foreknowledge God chose to forsake His Son, abandoning Him to His enemies for a greater Good. Clearly Jesus was in the mind and purpose of God from the beginning of Creation, and in His infinite wisdom He foresaw what would happen to Him; that He would be rejected, hated and finally put to death by evil men. God did not plan or desire this; far from it; it was men acting freely of their own volition, but He stood back and allowed events to develop into that final wicked tragedy because Jesus accepted the charge laid upon Him by which He could redeem the race.

This is the simple answer to your question; this is how Jesus' sacrifice declared God's righteousness. This is how Jesus is “the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe,” because we all owe our lives to Him and because He also gives believers the hope of Eternal Life. He alone, being sinless and born free from Adamic condemnation was able to suffer death for us, the just for the unjust to redeem us to God; suffer death and not perish because the grave could not hold Him and being raised in incorruptible spirit to live for ever and in due time to return and receive His inheritance, all things and people created by God.

Ernest Brady. (January 1985)

Note: The foregoing was sent as addressed and copies to members of the Nazarene Fellowship. Our views are fairly widely known and even more widely misrepresented and rejected. The reactions we have received have been varied and surprising. Some simply anathematize us. Others say they believe the same as we do but as they also defend the B.A.S.F. we do not think this means very much. The majority clearly attach more importance to their membership of the community than they do to the truth. It appears to us that whereas in the beginning Christadelphians regarded themselves in the apostolic tradition as individual responsible members of the Body of Christ, today, however you may feel yourself, you are effectively constrained by what you have helped to build. Since the sinful flesh division of 1873 the history, the literature and the organization of “Christadelphianism” imprisons you behind an impregnable wall of dogma and practice which is alien to the Spirit of Christ. It seems inevitable now that this condition will prevail until the end.

E.B.