

Open Letter to The Sutton Coldfield Christadelphians

April 2003

Dear Brethren and Sisters of the Sutton Coldfield Christadelphian Ecclesia,

It has been a joy meeting with you on Monday evenings since September last; an experience I shall always remember with great pleasure. Few people delight in studying the Scriptures together in these last days and feel close to those splendid characters of whom we read in Hebrews 11.

I know a few of you were a little concerned when you found I was of the Nazarene Fellowship and so I was very pleased to be welcomed as a Bible student. In fact I rather think we of the Nazarene Fellowship feel we have followed on from where Dr. Thomas left off when he died in 1871 and we have the greatest respect for his approach to the Scriptures.

Some of you are aware that I made notes on the talks and perhaps I may be forgiven for my forwardness in making the following rather lengthy observations.

The structure of the seminars is of course to introduce people to the Bible; that it is the Word of God to make one wise unto salvation and in this I feel you have ably achieved your aim. Having been a Sunday School teacher at Erdington Orphanage Road Ecclesia and for a time at Kingstanding too, for perhaps 40 years in total, I can appreciate the many Bible lessons we all need to learn in order to come to an understanding of God's Word - His will and purpose with mankind - the work of God in Christ Jesus.

Early on in the seminar the continual exhortation was to "search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (Jesus)." Again, "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." And again, in Acts 17 "They were more noble... in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." We were told to keep an enquiring mind and ask questions (but not during the seminars as this would be disruptive). When it came to the mention of "Bible helps," it was suggested we use such study tools as commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, concordances and lexicons but this came with the "health warning" that

"they are the works of uninspired men commenting about inspired scripture passages. Such reference books are very useful, but they should always be read carefully with an eye toward scepticism. Never place total confidence in the writings of uninspired men. Verify or disprove what they suggest for yourself, from the Scriptures."

At this point it came to my mind that the same "health warning" must be applied to the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith also, being the root cause of argument and division for the past hundred years, but instead, all I said after that particular meeting was that the greatest help of all had been left out - prayer; for we are all taught of God. The observation was appreciated by the speaker and it was included in the next week's seminar.

The greatness of God was briefly considered. I suppose of necessity this aspect of the Creation had to be kept short in order to fit in everything else. It was all too brief I felt because we should all start by considering God and His greatness. A consideration of infinite power in infinite space for infinite time takes us well outside our limited powers of comprehension. Once one realises that God exists and finds there is a message in the Bible, it seems only right that we should find out more about who God is and what that message is, and reading the Bible effectively requires reading prayerfully above all else.

I was pleased when at the first mention of resurrection the speaker stated: "God's ultimate revelations illuminate all earlier revelations." That is an excellent statement. Sadly, when this subject was dealt with in more detail at a later date the speaker forgot! But I will come back to this a little later.

In dealing with "The Purpose of God Revealed" the question was put, "Why did God create man? What was the divine motive?" and briefly answered by reference to Numbers 14:21, "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." The next question was "What is God's glory? How does one define glory?" Here the answer was put in the notes as -

"God = glory. God = righteousness, love, truth, wisdom. Hence to fill the earth with His glory is to fill it with His character, ways and thoughts - to manifest God is to show His glory."

My personal observation here is that "God is Love," and God's love is perfect. If it were not so then we cannot say that God is Almighty; i.e. if there were any imperfection in God's love, He would not be Almighty. All the other characteristics - His righteousness, truth, wisdom, together with others not mentioned in these notes such as mercy and grace, all flow from that love. So to say that "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" is to say it will be filled with His Love.

Section 24 - "Life and Death in the Bible." In the notes we read:

"Death was not a part of the creation as it was first made. All that God had made was deemed 'very good.' However, God did impose one simple law upon Adam and Eve in the garden. It says in Genesis 2:17, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Is it really true that death was not part of God's "very good" creation as it was first made? I believe this to be an unfounded assumption and so did Dr. Thomas when he wrote in "Herald of The Kingdom" for July 1855:-

"Moses tells us 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"

"Death and corruption then, is the fundamental law of the six days; seasons of decay and death were institutions existing before the fall. 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 the history of the six days."

And in "Elpis Israel" page 65 he wrote:-

"It is possible that Adam and Eve would have died after a long time if no further change had been operated upon their nature... The animal nature will sooner or later dissolve. It was not constituted so as to continue in life for ever, independent of any further modification. We may admit, therefore, the corruptibility, and consequent mortality of their nature, without saying they were mortal... in this sense, therefore, I say, that in their novitiate, Adam and his betrothed had a nature capable of corruption..."

Again in March 1871 in his final letter which he was in the middle of writing when he died he was explaining to his correspondent that:

"According to the constitution of the organism, so is the manifestation of results. Divine Power has made spirit out of the dust of the ground, and called it Man. He has so made

or organised it, that if not further interfered with by His Power, it may pass away. This is called flesh... and under ordinary conditions, cometh not again..."

As I have said, we have great admiration for Dr. Thomas's approach to the Scriptures but we are aware of uncertainties and contradictions in his writings. He too accepted this but all his life he was an investigator, ever prepared to review his understanding until he got it right at last; we should all be investigators - in spite of Robert Roberts saying, "We have passed the investigation stage."! And he, having convinced himself there was no more to investigate, drew up the Statement of Faith to prevent further progress; a Statement of Faith which has ever proved divisive and schismatic. No wonder many Christadelphians want to change it.

During these seminars there were one or two "Christadelphianisms" if I may call them that which I do not feel made much sense. Such phrases as "Adam's transgression is the cause of sin entering the world." Whatever does this mean? As sin is transgression of law then sin is the cause of sin entering the world"! What can one say? Passing over the fact that Eve was the first to transgress, there was no one else who could have been the first sinner; but to say Adam was either "the cause of sin" or "the cause of sin entering the world" is impossible to understand, but we were also told that, "We are all suffering for the actions of Adam and Eve." It seems almost customary to lay blame on Adam and Eve for our sufferings. But their sin is not the cause of our sufferings. There are two ways in which I think this statement is applied. One is that because of Adam's transgression death entered into the world, but this assumes that there was no death before Adam and Eve sinned. The weight of evidence is against this idea for the whole ecological system was one of birth, maturity, reproduction and death from creation. Secondly, the statement that we all suffer "for the actions of Adam and Eve" implies that we are being punished in some way for something for which we are not responsible. But this is against God's teaching in Ezekiel 18:20:- "the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

Once again I believe if we start with God and see what His plan and purpose is we shall avoid some of these misconceptions. Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. This tells us that all was known to God before He created Adam and Eve and provided them a Garden. God knew beforehand that they would transgress His law; that He would forgive, or cover over their transgression with the slaying of, I believe, a lamb in Eden typifying the violent death of His only begotten Son. No one can lay blame on Adam any more than we can lay blame on our own brothers and sisters, friends and neighbours for the things we suffer.

On one occasion the speaker, with reference to the temptation of Jesus, said, "If Jesus had chosen to be King there and then, He would have eventually died." This view assumes that it would have been a sin for Jesus not to have gone to the Cross. However, there was no law saying that He should lay down His life for us. He gave His life voluntarily, and thereby we give Him the greater honour. Had God demanded that He lay down His life, otherwise He would have been a transgressor, is to place God in the position of using the Jews and Romans to kill Him. I do not believe this was the case. Jesus said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Surely Jesus was referring to Himself here, that if He did not die, He could abide alone, that is, without "bringing many sons to glory." If the options for Jesus were that He either die on the Cross or die as a sinner robs Him of all glory and honour.

At the start of our consideration of the Gospel record of Luke I noted the possibility that Luke "having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first" could be interpreted as "having had perfect understanding from above," that is to say, that he was claiming inspiration. The Greek word "*anōthen*" is here translated "from the beginning," but elsewhere it is variously translated "from above" as in John 3:31, 19:11, James 1:17, 3:15, 3:17, or "born again" as in John 3:3, 3:7 or "from the top" as in Mark 15:38. An interesting point but not of earthshaking moment.

When considering Luke 4 one speaker quoted Hebrews 2:14, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same; that through death he might

destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” This, said the speaker, was proof that Jesus had destroyed the devil. But is it? I think not. Paul in Acts 13:10 calls Elymas “thou child of the devil.” He exhorts the Ephesians (4:27) “Neither give place to the devil,” and in Ephesians 6:11 “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the whiles of the devil.” Likewise in 1 Timothy 3:6,7; 2 Timothy 2:26, while James exhorts us “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” See also 1 Peter 5:8, 1 John 3:8,10, Revelation 2:10, 12:9, 12:12, 20:2, and finally Revelation 20:10 tells us when the devil is cast into the lake of fire. That is when the devil is destroyed.

A careful reading of Hebrews 2:14 does not tell us that the devil is already dead for it is not in the past tense. We know that Jesus has destroyed the power of the devil to enslave us because Jesus has freed us from his (its) bondage but the devil is yet to be destroyed when death itself is destroyed. A.D.Norris was wrong when he wrote in his book “Understanding The Bible” of the body of Jesus on the Cross “there hung the devil dead.” That remark caused so much offence that it was taken out of later editions. It must be said however, that the final destruction of the devil will be due to Jesus Christ giving His life for us in crucifixion.

Again, during the course of the seminar we were given a very good description of what the “devil” is. Unfortunately I did not write it down at the time but from memory it went something like this: ‘The devil is the outworking of people’s unlawful desires.’ I think that is as good a definition as I have seen. The definition I have used for the past twelve years is that “the ‘devil’ is a personification of man’s will when opposed to God’s will.”

On the denigration of mankind:

One thing I have noticed since childhood is that Christadelphians tend to blacken mankind by using such passages as Psalm 14:1-3, Jeremiah 17:9 and Isaiah 55:8.

All the above were quoted during our Monday evenings together but I seriously challenge that we would come to such a conclusion if we were to read the Bible effectively. I therefore put forward a better view, and while I’m sorry it is so long I feel it is important: -

The speaker used Romans 3, along with Psalm 14, Jeremiah 17 and Isaiah 55, to ‘prove’ that all mankind is wicked; however, reference to Paul’s sources in Romans 3 show he selected passages for the purpose of showing most men are depraved in contrast to the faithful. The context should be taken into account in all cases and these passages will be seen to have been misused by Christadelphians for far too long:

(A) Romans 3:10-12 “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Paul took this reference from **Psalm 14:1-3** - “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Comment:- The “all” in verses 2 & 3 of this Psalm refers to - “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” of verse 1, but in contrast, verses 4 and 5 refer to “My people – the righteous.” The corrupt are they “who eat up my people... for God is in the generation of the righteous.”

(B) Romans 3:13 “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.”

Paul took this reference from **Psalm 5:9** - “For there is no faithfulness in their mouth: their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.”

Comment: By way of contrast, in verse 7 we read about those to whom this does not apply - "But as for me, I will come into Thy house in the multitude of thy mercy"

(C) **Romans 3:14** "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness?"

Paul took this reference from **Psalm 10:7** - "His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity."

Comment: Verse 12 of this Psalm contrasts this with the humble - "Arise O Lord; lift up thine hand: forget not the humble."

(D) **Romans 3:15-17** "Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known."

Paul took this reference from **Isaiah 59:7,8** - "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their parts."

Comment: This chapter in Isaiah in presenting only one side of the picture in order to show the need for the Messiah lest all should suffer the same fate.

(E) **Romans 3:18** "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Paul took this reference from **Psalm 36:1** - "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before their eyes."

Comment: And verse 7 of this Psalm tells us, in contrast, of the faithful - "How excellent is thy loving kindness, O Lord! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."

Other passages used for the purpose of 'proving' all mankind to be wicked: -

(F) **Jeremiah 17:9** - "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

Comment:- This chapter contrasts between the faithful and the unfaithful. Verse 7 - "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is..."

(G) **Isaiah 55:8** - "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

Comment:- This chapter is a plea to the unrighteous to turn to the Lord. It is not stating our inability to be perfect. "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Isaiah 55:7 reads - "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Wherever there is a derogation of human beings in Scripture there is always a contrasting balance to be found nearby giving the other side - in reference to those who serve God and keep His laws.

The lesson here for those Christadelphians who apply these references to themselves and suppose their hearts to be deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it? or that there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, or that their thoughts and ways cannot be well pleasing to God, then they are making themselves like the wicked and not like the righteous; they are allying themselves with those who oppose God. Is this really where you want to be?

The talk on baptism was inadequate. The baptism of John was for the forgiveness of sins and this is almost all that was said about baptism into Christ. So I ask, why was it that Apollus, having

been baptised by John for the forgiveness of sins, was later baptised into Jesus Christ? There must have been a significant reason for this.

There is far more to baptism than the forgiveness of sins. When we go down into the waters of baptism we go down bearing both our personal sins and the condemnation (alienation) imputed to us as sons of Adam (Galatians 3:22); when we come up out of the water, our personal sins and the imputed sin inherited from Adam are taken away and we bear instead Christ's righteousness which has been imputed to us. After baptism our personal sins are forgiven day by day as we seek forgiveness. But there is no longer condemnation as Paul tells us in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Another aspect of this imputed righteousness is that we receive 'zoe' life of the Lord at the same time. In order to establish this fact I recommend one reads through the gospel record of John noticing every occurrence of the word life. The first occurrence is in John 1:4 - "In him was life (*zoe*) and the life (*zoe*) was the light of men." The Greek word 'zoe' is used (some 40 times) for 'life' up until John 10:11. Here we come across the Greek word *psuche* - "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life (*psuche*) for the sheep. Jesus did not lay down His *zoe* life; He lay down His *psuche* life. From the time when we are baptised "we know that we have passed from death unto life (*zoe*), because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John 3:14), i.e. he who abides in death has no (*zoe*) life. In John 10:10 Jesus tells us: "I am come that they might have life (*zoe*) (as a present possession) and that they might have it more abundantly (in the Kingdom)."

It is worth noting that Jesus rose with *zoe* life as He confirms in Revelation 1:18 - "I am he that liveth (*zao*), and was dead; and, behold, I am alive (*zao*) for evermore." Nowhere are we told that He received His *psuche* life again. *Psuche* life is in the blood and this Jesus shed on the cross.

Another Greek word in John's gospel is well worth looking at. It is the use of *krisis* chapter 5 verses 22,24,27 and 29. Verse 22:- "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment (*krisis*) unto the Son." Verse 24:- "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life (*zoe*), and shall not come into condemnation (*krisis*); but is passed from death unto life." Verse 27:- "The Father... hath given him authority to execute judgement (*krisis*) also, because he is the Son of God." Verse 29 "And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life (*zoe*); and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation (*krisis*)." This supports and confirms other Scriptures which tell us there is no future adverse judgment for the elect, as we have seen from Paul's teaching in Romans chapter 8 verse 1: "There is there now no condemnation (*katakrisis* = 'down- judgment') to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

This brings us to the evening when we considered the resurrection. In the notes we read on page 220:-

"It is important to notice that when Jesus speaks of "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection of the dead" He uses the phrase "the resurrection of the dead" to mean the whole process of resurrection, judgment and salvation. This must be true, because the scriptures teach that not all who are raised will receive everlasting life. Daniel 12:2 - "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

Sorry to have to say so but this truly is Christadelphian muddle and confusion! It is important to notice that when Jesus speaks of the resurrection of the dead, He does NOT mean "the whole process of resurrection, judgment and salvation." He meant what He said. Just two Mondays before this consideration we read of Zacchaeus who said "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house..." Zacchaeus received salvation as soon as he had a good conscience toward God. When do we receive salvation? Even before baptism, for "baptism is

the answer of a good conscience toward God.” (1 Peter 3:21). So salvation comes first of all. Then follows baptism, followed by a life walking after the Spirit.

And what about judgment? If we confess and are forgiven our debts every day then what have we to confess at a Judgment Seat? Nothing whatsoever! God knows who to raise up when “one is taken and the other left,” (Matthew 24:40,41) so for them the judgment happened during their lifetime. As for those to be raised to condemnation and suffer the second death we should not assume they will be raised at the same time as the righteous, for they too, are known to God during their lifetime. We do not have to go before a Judge in order to decide the case as in secular court, for all is known to the Lord here and now. We can’t tell him anything knew at the Judgment Seat which might help us scrape through ‘by the skin of our teeth’ as it were, to enjoy eternity.

And whatever happened to the thought expressed earlier that “God’s ultimate revelations illuminate all earlier revelations.” The quotation from Daniel is one of the earlier revelations concerning the resurrection of the dead so we must consider what we are told in later revelations before we draw conclusions, and we have only to go the ultimate revelation in the Book of Revelation chapter 20 verse 6 to read of some illumination:-

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

We learn from this that those raised for condemnation do not have their part in the first resurrection. Secondly therefore, the notion that “Jesus meant the whole process of resurrection, judgment and salvation” is altogether topsy-turvy nonsense. Salvation, judgment and resurrection is the correct order. Salvation comes first and is followed by judgment, (day by day) and then for those who die in the Lord, there is resurrection in *zoe* life.

“And so also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption: it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

And for those who have not died but have received salvation by the time Jesus returns they will be changed in the twinkling of an eye.

And now we come to the last evening, 31st March. According to the programme we should have had a talk on ‘The Atonement’; the most important evening of all because The Atonement is The Gospel; and it tells us how we are reconciled to God. Having read the notes a week earlier I learnt who the speaker was to be and approached him and said that having read through the notes I would not be able to let him teach such things as were there without challenging him. He replied “If you challenge me I will ask you to leave.” I said “That’s a pity, because it gives me a problem - I do not feel I would be doing my Christian duty if I did not object to some of the teachings.” He simply replied, “It would solve your problem if you do not come.” I said I would think about that but would rather wait and see what he had to say. I awaited the last seminar with expectation. What happened? The speaker did not talk about The Atonement! Instead, he gave a half-hour talk following the genealogy of Jesus from Adam through to Mary, ending by saying that Jesus died for our sins.

This was very wise really and I was thankful for it because no one likes argument and nothing has ever been argued over more than the Atonement. And so the speaker used expediency to avoid facing the problem. So before I finish I want to go through some of the notes regarding the atonement which we find on pages 272-276 and point out the reasons why I would have challenged the speaker. I would ask readers especially to bear in mind that these teachings are being propounded under the heading, “Reading The Bible Effectively” and it will be seen that in some respects this has not been the case. Firstly then we read under the heading “What is atonement?” that “It involved covering of man’s sin which was the reason for the original breach.”

This is misleading and needs clarifying. The covering over of man's sins applied before the crucifixion. Even the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement did not take away sins. Jesus took away man's sins. That is to say that while all the sacrifices for sin from the time of Adam and Eve which foreshadowed the crucifixion, covered over man's sins and were termed "making atonement for their sins," our subject concerns the crucifixion in which Jesus achieved The Atonement and in which the Sin of the world is taken away, after which the sin's of the faithful are blotted out – not merely covered over.

And note again that two things are involved in Jesus taking away sin: the first is, as John the Baptist proclaimed - "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and the sin of the world to which John was referring is the one sin of Adam under which we are all concluded at birth; under which sin we are all condemned. This does not mean we are born sinners but that Adam forfeited his life when he sinned and as we receive our life from Adam, our life is also forfeit to sin. In this sense then, we say we are "in Adam". When we realise we are "in Adam" we can come out of Adam by baptism and be "in Christ." This is when we no longer belong to 'Master Sin' but we belong to Christ "for ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20), even "the precious blood of Jesus" (1 Peter 1:19).

The second matter to note is the forgiveness of our individual sins, the sins we commit after we are "in Christ"; these are taken away as we daily ask for forgiveness. It is important to note here that in the taking away of sin, the guilt of sin is no longer imputed to the sinner but the righteousness of Jesus is imputed instead.

Two or three generations back Christadelphians believed and taught that we did not know whether or not our sins were forgiven until we appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. I don't think there are many, perhaps not any, Christadelphians today who believe this and so there is no need to discuss this aspect here except to say that it has been a change for the better.

Next in the notes, three ideas are put forward as examples of how some people have envisaged how atonement works, they are:

- (a) Jesus placated an angry God, causing Him to give up His wrathful intentions upon man.
- (b) Jesus was a price paid to the Devil in order to release sinners from his grasp.
- (c) Jesus died instead of us, thus taking the punishment for our sins."

Continuing in the notes we read:-

"none of these approaches are a correct understanding of Bible truth. There are two principles which encapsulate God's work of salvation - these are love and forgiveness. (Romans 5:8). It is the love of God for His creation that initiated His desire to restore man's relationship with Himself. (John 3:16). Jesus also embraced that love which culminated in His willing sacrifice. God gave His Son and Jesus gave his life. What greater acts of love could we conceive?"

Regarding (a) we need say nothing. Regarding (b) we note that Jesus did pay the price - his own "precious blood," but it was not paid to the Devil but to the law.

Regarding (c) we read in Isaiah 53 that Jesus took the punishment of our sins upon Himself:- "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows... he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed... and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all... for the transgression of my people was he stricken... when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin... for he shall bear their iniquities... and he bare the sin of many..."

Those who say Jesus did not die in our stead must answer the question: how could Jesus take the punishment of our sins upon Himself and yet not in our stead?

In the "Christadelphian" for last December (2002), there was an article on The Atonement in which we read (page 456);

"We must go back again to the ritual type and ask, what does this mean? The blood of the animal was a token of a life taken, and an identification of the man with the animal. By placing his hands upon its head he said, in effect, 'this is what ought to happen to me; I am the sinner and death is my due.' It becomes the ritual expression of the fact that the man recognised that death was due for sin." (John Carter, former Editor of The Christadelphian, writing on The Atonement).

We know from the Law of Moses that the animals sacrificed for sin died in place of the sinner and we learn from the New Testament that Jesus died as the Antitype of the animal sacrifices. Who then can argue against Jesus dying in our stead?

Under the heading "Forgiveness" Acts 2:38 is quoted which is followed by:-

"The cross of Christ is not about settlement of debts made by a payment of life. Neither is it about the offering of a substitute life of Jesus so that others can go free. It is rather the means of forgiveness. An act of God's grace. It is not an act of right but rather an act of favour. God's way of salvation enables men and women to seek forgiveness through repentant and willing hearts."

It is true that forgiveness is an act of God's grace but it is this very act of grace which makes us free as Jesus Himself tells us: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36). Free from what? Why free from sin and free from condemnation and its consequent death of course.

After telling us that "Man needs a Saviour," quoting Romans 5:12, and "A Saviour was foretold long ago," quoting Genesis 3:15, we are told, and correctly, that:

"the serpent represents sin (see 1 Corinthians 15:56); the seed of the serpent represents sin's children - those who walk in the ways of sin; the woman represents the human race; The seed of the woman represents the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus, the seed of the woman, would deal sin, the serpent, a fatal wound in the head. This was what he accomplished at his crucifixion; at the same time Jesus would receive a temporary wound in the heel. He died as part of his battle against sin, but he rose again from the dead on the third day."

Here once again is muddle and confusion! We are first told that the serpent represents sin. Next we are told that the seed of the serpent represents sin's children, those who walk in the ways of sin. And then we are told that it is the woman who represents the human race. O.K. So who are the children who walk in the ways of sin if they are not the human race? Are we to believe the woman represents the seed of the serpent?

That's muddle and confusion enough but it is worse confounded when we are also told that the seed of the woman represents the Lord Jesus Christ!

The seed of the woman referred to does not represent the Lord Jesus Christ; the Seed of the woman is the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Genesis 3:15 where God is addressing the serpent, we read "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." The woman here

referred to was Eve and she does not represent the human race. Eve was unique among women for she was taken from the side of Adam, while all other human beings were in his loins at that time.

Jesus was the seed of the woman and He was not the seed of man. Jesus said “Ye are from beneath, I am from above, ye are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8:23). It could be seen of Eve’s eventual production of the Saviour, Jesus Christ that He was never in the loins of Adam.

Jesus was the seed of the woman, through the line of Abraham and David, but the Son of God, not of Adam, and therefore not, like us, born in bondage to sin. There can be no doubt that He was of one flesh with us, and that He was tempted in all points as we are, being thus born of a woman, but since He was the Son of God and it is testified of Him that He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.

Then we come to “The Serpent on the Pole.” After quoting John 3:14, the notes tell us:

“Jesus is referring to an Old Testament incident to do with Israel's wilderness wanderings. As a result of Israel's sin (Numbers 21:6-9), the Lord sent fiery serpents into the Israelite encampment, which bit the people causing men to die. When the people sought a way of salvation God told Moses to set a brass serpent up on a pole, which the people could look upon to be healed from the deadly snake bites. This was an enactment of the principles of salvation through the cross of Christ.”

There seems to be a change for the better here also for there is no mention of brass being representative of sinful nature, which claim has long since been proved unsustainable. But then follows a comparison between Numbers 21:1-9 and John 3:14,15 to which the notes add that “the serpent (is) a symbol of sin” and concludes by asking the question: “How does Jesus represent sin?” then giving the answer:

“Although Jesus was sinless in His life, He is able to represent sin because He was born of a woman, as we are, and therefore shared our human nature with its weakness and tendency to sin. As a result of his human nature, Jesus was truly tempted like we are. (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus fully shared our human nature, inherited from his mother, and despite his sinlessness this enabled him to be “made sin” for us. He was death-stricken like any other man: “He (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin,” 2 Corinthians 5:21. In this way, when he was crucified, Jesus truly nailed sin to the cross, and destroyed its power over repentant sinners; “God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” (Romans 8:3). This verse tells us that Jesus was victorious over sin on its own field of battle - the flesh (or human nature). The serpent was dealt a fatal bruise to the head as foretold, and its power of sin is now destroyed for those who seek God's forgiveness through Christ.”

In saying that Jesus was able to represent sin because He was born of a woman, we are then expected to assume that because all mankind are born of women, it follows that we all have sinful flesh including Jesus.

Maybe little more can be said than has already been written about Romans 8:3. For generations this verse has been the refuge of the Christadelphians arguing that our flesh is full of sin, but it is a ridiculous idea when one thinks about it logically. How can sin be an infection in one’s flesh when we are clearly told that sin is transgression of God’s law which is an abstract concept. Every Bible student knows, or certainly should know that this one verse in Romans teaches a falsehood simply because of the prejudiced interpretation by translators who believed in the Roman Catholic Original Sin Doctrine. Let us just suppose for a moment we have flesh literally full of sin, it must then follow that only God could have put it there and made us like that. What loving Father would do such a

thing? There is a simple and a much better answer if we acknowledge and accept what Paul actually wrote in this verse and take the context in to due consideration. Paul has been talking about being sold under sin and being sin's possession, but he then goes on to thank God that he is no longer sin's possession, but that he has been "delivered from the body of this death" and he thanks God that he has been made so (made free) through Jesus Christ our Lord. Could Paul say this if sin was literally part of his flesh? He could not. Then he goes on in Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation (adverse judgment) to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." Are these the words of a man incapable of doing God's will because of sin in his flesh? No, as he says in another place, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Paul continues in the same vein in verse 3 when he writes, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sin's flesh and for sin, condemned sin (while he was) in the flesh." "Sinful flesh" here must be read as "sin's flesh;" for Paul was speaking about flesh being the possession of, or belonging to, sin. Adam sold himself (and all in his loins) to Sin as a Master in Eden, so Paul is speaking in legalistic terms and emphatically not saying that flesh is full of sin.

Furthermore we are told that Jesus came in the likeness of Sin's flesh but He Himself was never Sin's possession for we know for certain that Jesus was God's possession.

Oh, what a difference this makes to our understanding of Scripture! Now we don't have to blame God for putting sin in the flesh of mankind making it impossible for us not to sin, and neither do we have to invent a reason for Christ having to die for Himself.

But to continue the notes:

"Whilst the death of Jesus was a justified condemnation of his "sinful flesh." his resurrection was equally justified because of his personal sinlessness: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Acts 2:2). In all this God was upheld as a just and righteous Judge: "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice." (Romans 3:25 New International Version).

Why should we be expected to strain our reasoning and say that "in all this God was upheld as a just and righteous Judge"? The suggestion that the death of Jesus was a justified condemnation of his "sinful flesh" is a teaching from which reverent minds should recoil. This sort of reasoning calls travesty, justice! Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, righteous and perfect in all His ways, in whom there was no sin, who was holy, harmless and undefiled, and even Pilate says he found no cause of death in Him. Where shall we turn for one passage which tells us that Jesus was under condemnation and needed to die for Himself? Yet whom Christadelphians say He was justly condemned to death by His Father the righteous Judge! Never!

And the notes conclude:

"How do we obtain atonement? In other words, what must we do to be saved? The children of Israel had to look up to the serpent on the pole. We have to look to Jesus Christ, and associate ourselves with his sacrifice, by belief and baptism into him. If we do this, the God in His love will forgive us our sins: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? ... For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection... But now being made free from sin, and become the servants of God, ye have your fruit unto everlasting holiness, and in the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:3,5,22,23).

We agree with every word of this last paragraph though feel it should have been expanded to say more about baptism into Jesus Christ but as we have said a little about this already we leave it there for now.

To the novice the teachings found in these Christadelphian notes may sound innocuous or inoffensive, but for those who consider that all is well with Christadelphian teaching, I would plead with them to think again and do as Jesus said: “search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

Nothing can replace prayerful study to see if these things are so.

Jesus Christ was born the Son of God with a new life from the source of all life. This new life gave Jesus a life like ours but it was not, nor did it need to be, concluded under the sin of Adam. It was a life free from the condemnation under which all Adam’s descendants are born. The Gospel message is that we can break free from this condemnation by walking “not after the flesh but after the Spirit” and therefore we are no longer under condemnation, that is, we are no longer under adverse judgment.

There is so much more I would love to say as I have barely scratched the surface, but by the grace of God, maybe another time.

With love in the Lord to all the elect according to His abundant mercy.

Russell Gregory