

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No 224

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Editorial

Dear Sisters, Brothers and Friends, Loving greetings.

Recently I bought a second hand book called WHO'S WHO IN JEWISH HISTORY. It is an A to Z of important persons, mostly Jews but not all, who feature in the period of history after the New Testament. It is a large volume of over 400 pages so it contains many names that are very well known and some from the distant past who are comparatively obscure, to me at any rate.

I was most interested to read about one Shabbetai Zevi 1626-76. He is described as "False messiah." He was the son of a prosperous merchant in Smyrna, the important trading centre of Asia Minor. Evidently he was extremely pious and shewed an interest in cabbalistic books. Cabbala is a Jewish religious mysticism, mainly in the late medieval period and Cabbalists are students of this mysticism. Shabbetai Zevi was subject to moods of gloom and elation, moods that today would probably be explained as manic depression. In 1648 he declared publicly that he was the Messiah. According to the entry in this book he uttered the forbidden Name of God, which was taken as a sign that the time of redemption had come. But he was banished by the rabbinical authorities and he then eventually made his way to Jerusalem in 1663 and there he met Nathan of Gaza. Nathan was born in Jerusalem and lived in his father-in-law's house where he studied the Cabbala. Claiming to act on a vision Nathan proclaimed Shabbetai Zevi the Messiah with himself in the role of prophet. It was Nathan who assembled the Shabbetean teachings into a coherent system, and these mystical works circulated secretly for centuries after his death.

At this time in 1663 there was increasing persecution especially massacres in the Ukraine and this made many Jews believe that the darkest hour had been reached which would be followed by the redemption. Shabbetai returned in triumph to his home town in Smyrna in 1665, where his ecstatic welcome was noted by the English ambassador. From there the movement inflamed Jewish communities throughout the world.

The news that the Messiah had come was received with joy in Hamburg, Amsterdam and London. In Poland and Russia excited crowds marched through the streets carrying banners with a portrait of Shabbetai. It was confidently expected even in Christian circles that he would be crowned king of the Jews in Jerusalem within a couple of years. A circular was sent to all Jewish communities in the name of the 'first begotten son of God, Shabbetai Zevi, messenger and redeemer of the people of Israel.' During this period of general rejoicing, little rabbinical opposition is recorded; when the rabbis of Amsterdam tried to oppose Shabbetai's pronouncements, they were nearly stoned by their angry congregation. Stranger things were to follow for whilst travelling in Gallipoli Shabbetai was arrested by the Turkish authorities and at first this did not damage confidence in his mission, but in 1666 he was brought before the sultan and given the choice of

conversion or death, he denied his messianic claims and became a Muslim. The news of Shabbetai's conversion came as a tremendous blow and many believers, stunned by the news turned aside from the movement. As a Muslim Shabbetai was given an honorary post and a pension. His wife (an orphan from the Ukraine massacres) and some of his followers were also converted.

Shabbetai Zevi died in a small Albanian town and many more of his followers abandoned the movement. Some others converted to Islam, yet continued to believe in Shabbetai as a redeemer who would come again to lead them. Throughout Europe supporters of the movement persisted into the 18th century, concealing their beliefs from increased rabbinical repression. The Shabbetean movement was the most disruptive force in Judaism for centuries and the important consequence of this near schism was that the study of mysticism itself became regarded with suspicion.

Love to all. Helen Brady.

Brother Phil Parry Comments on Some Forum Posts

I was quite interested to read the Forum views and comments made by 'Mike' and answered by Brother R.Gregory on the basis of the inspired Word of God by the latter named rather than appeared to me Mike's tendency to lack the knowledge and understanding of that Word and the subject of Christ's death believed by Nazarene's to be a substitute for the judicial and inflicted death incurred by Adam but never experienced by him.

The dictionary meaning of 'substitute' in most cases is 'in place of' and true examples of this can be found in the scriptures. The very quotation used by Russell in his reply states in effect "a life for a life" or "a life instead of a life" (Leviticus 17:11). The same effect and example is found in Abraham's divinely withheld taking away of the life in the blood of Isaac (Genesis 22:13) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes and behold behind him a ram caught by his horns in a thicket and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up as a burnt offering in the stead of his son." Please note, this was not to prevent natural death of Isaac for he died a natural death years later; is it not therefore plain to see a similarity with the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God's provision slain in the place of Adam to save inflicted death but not from natural death?

The penalty passed upon Adam is the key to the understanding of 'Substitute' in this case and that key is not the death common to human and animal creatures but what Paul styles "The Death by sin" – a legal position, not a physical condition of corruptibility which Adam already was at his creation. How is it possible then that corruptibility is the result or penalty for Adam's sin as taught by Robert Roberts and his followers since 1873. R. Roberts was also in error in saying Edward Turney stated Adam's penalty to be eternal death – anything eternal is continuous but death is not. Turney's teaching was immediate loss of life, that is in Adam's case life in the blood forfeited by sin. Jesus laid down the same natural life in the blood unforfeited by sin, therefore Adam's debt to the law of sin and death was paid when Jesus cried out on the cross "It is finished" natural life ended then in the blood but His flesh remained and saw no corruption and He rose in incorruptible Spirit power. Eternal life is progressive, but death is not. Turney was correct and honest.

The lesson Mike must learn and appreciate is that Jesus was under no compulsion to die on Calvary as part of His obedience but was a willing sacrifice in the place of the blood of bulls and goats given of God as a provisional covering to make atonement upon the typical Altar until the fulfiller of the types was produced on the scene "And for this cause he (Jesus) is the mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" Hebrews 9:15.

A late friend once said to me that we should endeavour to walk the Calvary Road; Yes, I replied and Jesus left us an example that we should follow His steps but even if it led to the suffering of death it could not redeem a multitude who are concluded under sin." I hope all including Mike will agree eventually with the words of St Paul in Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Yes, and even for the ungodly (verse 7).

This is the true doctrine of Substitution as we see it, not as Christendom chooses it and teaches it through lack of understanding and faith.

Brother Phil Parry

Exhortation

Dear Brethren and Sisters, Greetings in Jesus' Name.

The Apostle Paul declares, "I am not ashamed, of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written. The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16,17).

In this regard no law of God is more absolute than "He that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Matthew 7:7, Luke 11:9). Those among us who have been taught to prize the Word of God and the truth it contains, should pray earnestly and implore the Most High, through Jesus, for a new heart and the right spirit which will seek those true riches by means of which "we might become partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

It is in this direction, as in no other, which enables man to seek pardon for his sins through the blood of Christ, "according as His Divine power hath given unto us all things pertaining to life, and godliness through the knowledge of Him that hath called us unto glory and virtue." (2 Peter 1:3).

Especially ought we to note that these exceeding great and precious promises are given to us dependant of one thing: that is, knowledge of Him. This is of paramount importance as we shall see if we read 1 Corinthians 13:2. Paul here testifies that "without such knowledge man would be nothing," which in the language of the Psalmist means, "a man that is in honour and understandeth not, is like the beast that perishes" (49:20).

This is indeed a strong expression, nonetheless. Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding are the things needful which enable men to seek salvation from man's great adversary - death. Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding are the requisitions necessary for the exertions to be in Christ. They constitute the incentive by which man will produce in himself as much of Christ's love as possible, and not as much as he hopes he will get away with.

But albeit, the greatest evil prevalent in this world today is the evil of the abuse of understanding; an evil that is as old as the hills. We read: "In the beginning God..." But alas, almost with his creation man asserts himself, and lo, the evil of the abuse of understanding is the evil thereof. Such evil was fostered and nourished to a degree that it flourishes above all else, and grieved God in His heart, and repented that He had made man. "Thus God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them, and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." (Genesis 6).

Despite this destruction, however, the widespread perversion of the will of God that existed before the flood was again soon in evidence. Here, the abuse of understanding induced Jonah to attempt an escape from the presence of God, and which deceived his sea-faring companions to "each cry unto his own God" (Jonah 1), exactly as if a piece of wood or metal could guard them from evil and danger. Similarly, the heathen aboard the ship in which Paul sailed from Malta to Syracuse worshipped Castor and Pollux (Acts 28:11). These were two idols into whose care the ship was committed, and were to the heathen what the living God was to Paul.

Athens is famous for its art and literature, but Paul bore testimony against the Athenians in the very city. "I beheld an altar with this inscription. To the Unknown God whom therefore ye ignorantly worship" (Acts 17:23). It is much the same today, perhaps not precisely an idol of wood or stone, nor yet an altar suitably inscribed, but many do worship a God that they know little or nothing about, and which is an evil more destructive than a deliberate sin. Colleges are erected in which the tutors cleave to the arm of flesh for

spiritual guidance, the intricacies of which enable them to pervert the very meaning of the Word of God and the Sacrifice of Christ. Their teaching distorts Biblical facts, and channels people's minds into belief of things not commanded in the Bible, which they pretend were spoken and taught by holy men of old. They go to their Bibles to prove what they think and not to learn what they haven't thought out. Graduates are honoured and diplomatised for the proficiency in the art of human contrivance of wisdom. Rational non-churchgoing men are driven to abstain from religion and to look upon God, and logically, as a reluctant old tyrant, for they cannot understand how the Graciousness of an ever merciful God falls below their own standard of ethics.

This obviously must be the case if it be true that natural death is the legacy of the Adamic sin, and true it will remain as long as a man continues to transform the truth of God into fantastic tales, and we are required to accept it as truth.

The initial error lies in the fact that a word, which has no reference to the natural man in Scripture, is inserted in a verse where it ought not to be. We speak of the creation of man. Here God relates the fact that "He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2:7).

The verse does not say "everlasting soul" - it merely says "living soul." Emanating from this initial abuse of understanding is the widespread perversion at the truth of God, and which assumes authority far above the written Word of God. Its destruction is paramount in the diminishing importance of the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and the supposed insatiable desire of God to seek vengeance.

Oh, let this not be the case with us; let us turn to our Bibles and read things as necessary to God's point of view and not as being necessary to our point of view; let us be convinced that God is more ready and more willing to impart us with knowledge, wisdom and understanding than we are to seek it.

The fundamental requirement of God is understanding, for it embraces all that is required of man which enables him to acknowledge God's wisdom and purpose with the creation of man, our relation to Him, and the teaching concerning Christ. It is only by understanding Christ's love towards us are we able to respond with a love for Christ, for to be ignorant of the things concerning Christ is to be ignorant of Salvation.

In the New Testament, as in Romans 13:14, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 4:24, and Colossians 3:10, the Apostle Paul speaks of believers in Christ having put on the "new man," and still more plainly, as in Romans 8, of the change effected in the believer. He there shows the obligation upon all who are made partakers of Salvation through Christ to forsake their evil ways and to live according to the spirit of Christ - always doing and submitting to the will of the Father.

My friends, to do this we must beware lest we be satisfied to let the Word of God be covered and obscured by the evil of the abuse of understanding; it is an evil imagination which cleaves to the hearts of men who will not permit God to put His truth into their minds. Let us pray earnestly that this may not be the case with us, "for dreadful is the state of those in whom sin is graven on the tables of their heart." (Jeremiah 17:1). God will put His truths into our minds, enabling us to do His will in all things if we obey His commandment to "keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23.

It is by knowledge, wisdom and understanding are we able to avoid despising the Word of God and to listen to His precepts and threatenings and accept the promise of mercy and the declaration of the love of God towards us. We need not be abusive of understanding if we have the earnest desire to learn His Word and enthusiastically respond with true love for the love given to us on the Cross.

Wisdom, knowledge and understanding is available to all who diligently seek the truth of God. We read, "the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Psalm 19:7, "the Lord preserveth the simple." Psalm 116:6, "the entrance of thy "Word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple." Psalm 119:130.

Yes, the Bible was written to make men wise unto salvation, and clearly set forth so that a plain simple man may understand the evil of sin and the Truth of the Gospel. Especially ought we to remember that Jesus chose twelve men who were plain fishermen, or much the same class, to preach the Word of God to the world (Matthew 4:18,21, Mark 1:19). This must be the strongest proof that can be of the Divine origin of the

Word of God and that its prevalence is not due to human contrivance of wisdom. Truly is the law of God more absolute in “he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” than any other.

We shall be foolish, to doubt it.

B. D. Lewis.

Life Through Christ Alone.

On the authority of Scripture, the penalty incurred by Adam was death by execution, and his redemption was imperative to the continuation of the Human Race. Had Sin been pardoned, and its guilt cancelled by the exercise of Sovereign will, or by an act of mere power, it might have been doubted whether the Almighty were indeed infinite in moral rectitude, or whether He would not, at some future time, re-impose the Doom. But no such injurious apprehension can be entertained, He changes not.

The first man, having sinned, could not, according to God’s Oath, have had any posterity, had not the penalty, or Price of Violated Law, been arrested by the Divine Promise; “The Seed of the Woman shall bruise the Serpent’s Head.”

God requires no extraneous motive to induce Him to pity: it is a question of “Law” and “Divine Love” in the Sinner’s redemption. The Love of God began in the very Garden of Eden: He did not allow the execution of the Law to overtake Adam, and consequently “blot out” the Human Race. He provided a Ransom or Substitute for Adam (1 Pet. 1:20; Job 3:-16; Rev. 13:8; Jo. 3:16).

Hence the slaying of Animals at once becomes significant. Thus the Sacrifice of Christ, though central in Human History, had its effect (though obscure) as really upon preceding ages as it has its effect upon succeeding ages. He was fore-ordained by the God of Love to be the “Human Ransom,” by which alone man was spared his natural existence and is invited to return to the “Loving Father” and live triumphantly in the untold ages beyond.

“I thank Thee, Father, Thou hast hid these things from the Wise and Prudent, and hast revealed them unto Babes.” No Son of God, i.e. Son by birth, as was Jesus. The writer refers to adopted sons later. This point must not be overlooked (hence it is emphasised here); can possibly come under condemnation, unless He individually sin. Jesus was the Christ, the “Son” of the Living God. Jesus did no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth. Therefore Jesus was free from condemnation. No adopted Son of God can be under condemnation if he walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, because the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made him free from the Law of sin and Death.

“The Soul that sinneth shall die.” “Without shedding of blood there is no remission.” Could the shed blood of the sinner redeem himself? Could you point out from Scripture where it says Yes? “What then, shall it profit a man, though he gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange (en antallagna) for his life?”

A.L. Wilson.

From the Forums

Our last Circular Letter contained an exposition of Romans chapter 7 in which I suggested that Paul was explaining the ending of the Law of Moses and the beginning of the Christian era in which salvation was through faith and baptism into the death of Christ.

Early in February I placed this exposition on two forums asking for comments and am pleased to say there was very little opposition to the exposition though some wanted more time to think about the implications before agreeing to it. Here are some of the responses:

From Forum: <http://bibletruthalive.org>

Brother X quoted several verses from Romans chapter 7 and ended by saying - "Surely this means that man is a sinful creature."

Russell writes:

"Dear Brother X, Man is not born sinful but is 'concluded under sin' for the purpose of separating the faithful from the unfaithful. When the faithful respond to God's call they leave the condemnation of those "in Adam" to be free "in Christ" - so that there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are "in Christ." Romans 8:1

That is the sum and conclusion of what Paul has said in Romans 7. We call it 'The Federal Principle.'

Baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God and this is when we leave being "in Adam" to be "in Christ" - it is then necessary to continue in this good conscience lest having been "graft in" we should be "cut off." Romans 11.

With Love in Jesus. Russell."

Brother X writes:

"Russell, by this, are you saying that all the Churches are wrong ?"

Russell writes:

"Dear Brother X, How many churches accept and teach one or more of these false doctrines introduced by Rome:- The Trinity, Mary the Mother of God, Original Sin, Immaculate Conception, Immortal Soul, Heaven going at death, Infant Baptism, Purgatory, Hell torment, Supernatural Devil/Satan, Infallibility of their leaders, Transubstantiation?

None of these are taught in the Scriptures. What a terrible legacy people inherit from their church leaders! Perhaps this goes some way to answering your question.

"Man shall not live... but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4. We must strive earnestly to seek Bible teachings and not be swayed by popularity. "Many be called but few chosen." Matthew 20:16

With Love in Jesus. Russell."

Brother X writes:

"Russell, thanks for your reply, note I did not say answer. Are you a Politician? Always answering a question with a question."

Russell writes:

"Dear Brother X, I am not a politician but sometimes feel it necessary to give an indirect answer. You asked if I was saying that all the churches were wrong. I could hardly have given the answer "yes" or "no" because I would be judging them all and that is not possible for me or you to do. We do not know who is in the body of Christ. Jesus knows and I am happy with that.

I do try hard to be positive. With Love in Jesus. Russell."

Brother X writes:

"Russell - Once again the Politician- no clear answer - but a moving of the goalposts. The Question was about the Churches, not about believers. We all know that God will not leave Himself without witness. That there will be some wise Virgins. And some remaining to be caught away.

The Question was do you think all the Churches are wrong? That is on the Question of their thinking on Paul's writing Romans chapter 7. Why do you think that your interpretation of this chapter, better than that of others ? Two Questions."

Russell writes:

“Dear Brother X, Thank you for qualifying your first question; also for your second question.

Question 1 - You ask if I think all the Churches are wrong in their thinking on Paul’s writing re Romans chapter 7?

Answer 1: It seems again I have to be the politician because I can’t possibly know what all the many thousands of Churches believe, though I am inclined to say that they are all wrong and if not all, then the great majority, as I believe God is not calling out Churches, but individuals for His name.

But I can say for certain that I am not alone in refusing to go along with the popular flow of the masses as can be seen under the heading of “Original Sin” in which I quote Dr Adam Clarke as follows:–

“It is difficult to conceive how the opinion could have crept into the Church, or prevailed there, that the Apostle speaks here of his regenerate state; and that what was, in such a state, true to himself, must be true of all others in the same state. This opinion has, most pitifully and most shamefully not only lowered the standard of Christianity but destroyed its influence and disgraced its character; it requires but little knowledge of the spirit of the Gospel, and of the scope of this Epistle, to see that the Apostle is here either personating a Jew, under the Law and without the Gospel, or showing what his own state was when he was deeply convinced that by the deeds of the law no man could be justified; and had not as yet heard those blessed words, Brother Saul, the Lord that appeared into thee in the way, hath sent me that thou mightest receive sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

I am sure Dr Clarke is right in what he says and this deserves serious consideration.

Question 2 - You ask why I think my interpretation of this chapter is better than others?

Answer 2: First, I recognise the difficulties which translators have presented us with in assuming the present tense throughout. The translators I feel must have been biased in favour of the doctrine of Original Sin and found support here for their false doctrine.

Second, expositors should not force Paul to contradict himself. At the time of writing this Epistle Paul could not be said to be doing what he hated or that he could not find how to perform that which was good, or that there was no good thing in him. This again is “Original Sin” nonsense.

Third, never can we find in scripture that a disciple of Christ, let alone an apostle, can be said to be in the state of being “sold under sin” which translators and expositors make the Apostle Paul out to be.

Fourth, the grammar is at fault in our translations. In Romans 8:1 we read “There is therefore now...” which obviously refers to the present so that what was written about beforehand must refer to some time past. Therefore the subject matter leading up to “now” is wrongly presented to us in the present tense. Past tense makes better sense.

Five, acknowledging that Paul was writing in the aorist tense enables us to see another point of view; in fact it opens up a whole new interpretation for us to consider. And that is what I have tried to show.

This interpretation is in keeping with all Scripture teaching whereas the conventional view is not. Therefore I commend this for everyone’s consideration.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.”

Brother X writes:

“Russell -- Thanks again for your reply. I would fully agree with you over the matter of God calling out individuals, not Churches (Groups). I also believe that the Translators (KJV) were

moved somewhat toward the King's pleasure. It would be good to see what some of the other Posters on the Forum think about your article."

Brother Julian,

"I am mulling this one over somewhat, which is why I have not made any comment up until now.

Though I tend to agree with Russell on most matters, I am still thinking more on this particular aspect in Romans. The problem I have at the moment is concerning being bound by law, and the continuing to sin after conversion.

Two things concern me:

1) The law is good. Though the consequences of breaking the law is not good for those who break it. Are we then not bound by the constraints of law, or is it rather that we are no longer considered condemned by our breaking it once we put on Christ? We are under commandments, and as such continue to be under law. It is my view that Paul is specific in his criticisms, and that he is making reference to the mechanical service to the ceremonial Law of Moses, and not to the general laws God gives concerning righteousness. Bear with me on this; how can those in Christ be without law, when we are most certainly under commandments concerning our conduct? Surely there are very specific laws concerning what is sin and righteousness? A commandment is law, it is that simple. Therefore we have to be careful when we approach Paul's instructions concerning faith versus law, in my view.

2) Is the person in Christ, the person of faith no longer capable of sin? Of course they are, and who can claim to not have sinned since their conversion? Not one I would suspect. Therefore, we have to face the fact that if we still sin after conversion, we are then breaking law (if we are to conclude that sin is breach of commandments, and commandments constitute law). If we do sin, are we then no longer able to obtain salvation? Is there one sin that will exclude us? Is there a level that is acceptable, and one that is not? How does this work? How much faith, or how much grace is required to cancel out how much sin?

Love in Jesus, Julian."

Brother X:

"Dear Brother Julian, I understand your concern, as the scriptures in many places, tell us of the goodness of the Law, and that it will not pass away. Should we keep it? It can hurt nothing to try. Do we have to? I now think No, but would not try to break it. I attach, some verses of Scripture to read, helpful in knowing that the keeping of the Law is good. But -- yes that word that comes up very often is also there. Matthew 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:17 "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Matthew 5:18 "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Luke 10:26 "He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Luke 10:27 "And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Luke 10:28 "And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." Luke 16:17 "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Romans 2:13 "(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." Romans 2:14 "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:" Romans 2:15 "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." Romans 3:31 "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." Romans 7:12 "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Romans 7:22 "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:" Romans 7:25 "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Romans 8:4 "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 13:10 "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." 2 Corinthians 9:8 "Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?" However the Big 'BUT'

Galatians 5:18 “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” Galatians 5:4 “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” Galatians 3:18 “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” Philippians 3:9 “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:” 1 Timothy 1:9 “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers.” Hebrews 7:19 “For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.”“

Julian writes:

“Hi Brother X, Yes, I know these passages, but one question; are we under commandments? If so, is this not still law?

Love in Jesus, Julian.”

Russell writes:

“Dear Julian, First you ask, “Are we then not bound by the constraints of law, or is it rather that we are no longer considered condemned by our breaking it once we put on Christ?”

And your second point concerns our level of sin: “If we do sin, are we then no longer able to obtain salvation? Is there one sin that will exclude us? Is there a level that is acceptable, and one that is not? How does this work? How much faith or how much grace is required to cancel out how much sin?”

I think these can be answered together. It has to do with understanding the “federal principle” – of being “in Adam” or being “in Christ.” Firstly, it is surely as you say, that because ‘we are no longer condemned by our breaking it (the law or commandments) once we put on Christ.’ We are “In Christ.” - “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ.” Romans 8:1. This is how we are under grace; it is because we are in covenant relationship with God through Jesus. “This is the new covenant in my blood.” Once in this covenant relationship we can seek forgiveness and know for certain that we receive it through faith. We are under grace operates because of the law and are thereby not condemned by it.

To expand on this a little; we, in Christ, are asked to keep the commandments (the law). Those not “in Christ” are not expected to keep the law. However, if through our own weakness and lack of self-will we succumb to temptation and go astray we can seek forgiveness which is freely and generously given through Jesus. In seeking forgiveness we are still showing some faith in what Jesus has accomplished for us. Having been grafted into the True Vine, we are not cut off.

But if we ignore our new relationship with Jesus and choose to go the way of the world and do not seek forgiveness because we have lost all faith, then we are left with “a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.” – Hebrews 10:26. This is a worse position than for those who live their lives in ignorance of the gospel; they remain “in Adam” and perish like the animals, for man hath no pre-eminence above the beasts that perish. But those having seen and rejected the gospel are held responsible for crucifying Christ afresh. Their final destiny is the “second death.”

It will be found that every reference which Brother X has used in his post above fits perfectly into this picture.

At this point I feel constrained to mention Peter Watkins’ dreadful article on this subject which appeared many years ago in The Christadelphian Magazine because it shows a stark contrast to the Nazarene Fellowship view. It was because of conclusions like Peter Watkins’ that I felt it necessary to write my piece on Romans 7. This is what he wrote:

“Sin is a product of Adamic flesh, and sin after baptism indicates a revival of the Adamic nature which we purported to destroy at baptism. Yet if we are still members of the body of Christ we are still without sin, for “in him is no sin.” If we are truly in Christ, it is not we that have sinned, but it is the irrepressible Adamic nature which we have been striving to mortify

that has obtruded itself - and we heartily deplore the fact. As long as we deplore our transgressions - as long as they are committed despite ourselves and not because of ourselves - we remain in Christ, and righteous.”

This really is appalling rubbish which we would expect to hear from some Roman Catholic preacher. It shows a worrying lack of understanding.

Perhaps it may have been better not to mention it, but I have, so there it is. Perhaps someone will learn from other’s mistakes.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.”

Posts from: <http://groups.msn.com/TruthAlive> forum

Robin writes:

“Russell, I appreciate the hard work put into this paper regarding Romans 7. This is one of my favourite parts of the new testament and so I would like to comment, as I think this whole series (esp. chapters 6-8) is profound in what Paul is trying to convey as it was never before been conveyed before him.

The key to understanding where Paul is coming from, I am convinced, is in his effort to contrast a law-based system over against a grace-based one. The law-based system is a method of justification for one’s essential being in terms of value, acceptability, lovability, etc., that is based on what people know about right and wrong and how they apply that knowledge. This justification becomes, of course, not only the standard one uses for his own self, but for others as well. The psychological ramifications of this are profound to the heart individually, generationally, and globally. The world has developed on a foundation that is nothing short of an entire system on which we don’t just judge behaviours, but establish the very criteria that determines how we judge our own (and everyone else’s) essential being. Any child (as Adam and Eve were, and we are in God’s eyes) who begins to think that his or her lovability and inherent value is dependent and conditional on their own knowledge and appropriate implementation of right and wrong, is heading immediately down a path of sin and destruction. Envy, jealousy, adultery, covetousness, and every evil thing are the symptoms of this wrong-thinking. We are constantly reacting to unconscious beliefs we have made agreement with. But because they are unconscious, we can make the mistake of thinking they are just part of an evil human nature that is somehow mysteriously implanted in our “flesh.” Hence, the original sin doctrine.

Paul spoke of this unconscious force as his flesh. It seems to come out of nowhere. He consciously agrees with the law of God (the good that God would have him do) and therefore in his present converted state, he knows that sin is not the truest part of him. His essential nature is everything that Jesus was. Jesus is the essential man. It is the reflected glory we have from God that has been buried under years of our own lives in a performance-driven environment that is rooted solidly in this world. But now that he is converted, he no longer agrees with this law-based system of justification that has subverted his heart. He now agrees with what God has revealed in Jesus, that the truth is, God operates (in his relationship with us kids) from a grace-based system... and He always has. If one truly believes this... making it the basis of his understanding about his relationship with God, his own measure of worth, acceptance, and lovability, then everything begins to change. Understanding how your Father really feels about you, and what he really intended for you, as a child who is loved without regard to moral merit, is heart changing. The “psychology” of it is profound. The unconscious drivers change, and so does our behaviour.

But Paul still battled with the old man as we do, because old unconscious beliefs don’t go away overnight, and neither do the symptoms that are attached to them. This is an extremely crude example that is less spiritual based than it is physical; but if one grows up absolutely believing that someone of another ethnicity is evil, even when you start to suspect or even believe otherwise, you will still tend to automatically (unconsciously) react according to your old beliefs. It takes time to adjust to the new psychology... your new belief, if you truly have a new belief, of course.

Therefore, I conclude that Paul was indeed talking about his present condition in Romans 7. He was contrasting how the law based system still affected his behaviour, but now he was no longer blindly following that system. He now realized there was another system and was believing in that, and had come to this through Jesus' life, gospel, as well as his death and resurrection. Jesus was actually going down with him into the wounds of his heart and partnering with him to set him free from the captivity of sin and death, which had actually began to take charge when he was still a young child believing, thinking, and living according to the system that engulfed his parents, graceless religion, and society as a whole.

Robin''

Russell writes:

“Dear Robin, Thank you for your post.

The Law of Moses, in which Paul had been trusting, was a grace-based system. Every system of justification which involves forgiveness had essentially to be grace-based. The Law of Moses was such a system involving a multitude of sacrifices for sin, both individual sacrifices as well as national sacrifices for sins. So, I agree with you that it is true that God has always offered salvation on a grace-based systems and there has never in the history of man-kind, a law-based system of salvation. “By grace are ye saved” Knowledge of the Old Testament and its various laws and covenants, as well as a quick glance at Hebrews 11 will show that all the faithful mentioned were saved by the grace of God.

Therefore there is no reason at all for us to speculate that Paul should have had a subverted heart as you stated. Paul was a faithful and zealous Jew, but what he hadn't realised was that the Law of Moses was ended and this is what Jesus convinced him of in that startling revelation on the road to Damascus. God then used Paul as a chosen vessel to show this new covenant to the world. Paul was concerned with the need for all people to be “in Christ” by baptism into His death as the beginning of a new life in Him – a life which could lead to eternal life by remaining faithful. Jesus didn't die on the cross to give us eternal life; He died on the cross to give us the opportunity of eternal life through being in covenant relationship with Him. “This is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for you.”

You say “Paul still battled with his old man as we do.” But the only “battle” we have to face is one of choice - “Shall I do what God wants me to do or shall I not?” In fact, this “battle” does not start until we decide we want to be a disciple of Jesus. We have been given a free-will to use His laws as we will, and God asks us to exercise it in order to build characters well pleasing to Him. I maintain that it is no harder or easier to do wrong than it is to do right and talk of Paul knowing “that sin is not the truest part of him” is jargon, I feel.

You talk of “The psychological ramifications of this are profound to the heart individually, generationally, and globally” - but the Christian is not involved with the world and its values or its psychological ramifications. Indeed all that is good and only what is good about psychology has always existed in Christ's teaching.

You will realise I do not feel your view has much to commend it and once we see the fact of Romans 8:1 that we are no longer under condemnation because we are no longer “in Adam” but “in Christ” it is clear that Paul was not talking of his present position in Romans 7:14 to 24 as he said also in verse 4 – “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye be married to another, that ye should bring forth fruit unto God.”

With Love in Jesus. Russell.”

...and then follows another lengthy post from Robin repeating much of his previous convictions and while agreeing that Paul was not under condemnation...

Robin writes:

“he (Paul) still struggled with the old man, as do we. It is dangerous to be teaching otherwise to folks who are trying to find the way of escaping destructive behaviours. And it seems to show a lack of understanding about how the human mind works.

Edgar writes:

“Dear Russell and Robin, I hope readers on Truth Alive will set aside a little time to read your correspondence with care and reflectiveness.

For myself I am attracted to some of the implications of Robin’s exposition with its possible understanding of what a ‘nature’ really is and indeed what identity is, away from legal and biological definitions, yet he seems to have avoided Pelagianism with its idea that we are capable of perfection by our own efforts.

Thank you both for getting us to think more closely.

With love in him who gained the victory. Edgar.”

Russell writes:

“Dear Robin, You say “Paul was not under condemnation but he still struggled with the old man, as we do.”

I would rather believe what Paul says about this in Romans 6:6 – “Knowing that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.”

Paul’s “old man” was crucified when he was baptised into the death of Christ. It was not there for him to struggle with. All he had to do was choose whether to do good or not, as we do. That is the ‘struggle’ we all face.

You say “You cannot just will yourself to change.”

But your will is your choice. If it is your will to follow Christ you are free to do so. People commonly call it free-will but the fact that it is one’s will implies freedom of choice and that is the purpose of God’s laws and commandments for us.

You say “...there needs to be a repentance that calls you to your deep wounds so that you and Jesus can go down there together for healing.”

Sounds marvellous but whatever does it mean? Are you referring to redemption or to salvation? I cannot tell.

You say “He came to set the captives free.”

Indeed He did. And free from what? “If the Son therefore shall make you free ye shall be free indeed.” – John 8:36. This was the work of God in Christ and we humbly thank them both for their mercy and grace and Jesus for His strength of character and determination and courage to go through the horrors of crucifixion for us. Jesus set the captives free when He died on the Cross. It is our great privilege to be able to accept this freedom which He offers when we give the answer of a good conscience towards God in baptism, for that is the moment for each of us when “there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ.” – Romans 8:1, for that is the moment when they are made “free from the law of sin and death.” – Romans 8:2.

You say “That struggle for freedom begins at conversion, but it does not end until death” and “Some are more imprisoned than others, but we all are to one degree or another.”

I would rather accept the freedom we have in Christ.

You say “they needed and still need today, to see the bigger picture... the bigger issue we are dealing with. Law and works; faith and grace. They are mutually exclusive systems that have their foundation in the human mind and heart.”

However, law and works (and here I mean the works of those in Christ); faith and grace have their foundation in the love of God for mankind. Grace operates within law. To make them mutually exclusive is to destroy the gospel. Grace is being free from the law of sin and death.

God has made us rational human beings capable of discerning right and wrong according to His holy laws if His laws are what concerns us and we either go God's way or our own. There is no bias that forces us to do evil any more than there is a bias toward doing good; we choose one way or the other as we will. Either we have free will and believe that we do - or we don't believe it.

What is holding one back from being what he or she ought to be? Simple weakness? or perhaps God gave us a faulty nature with unconscious drivers? Jesus kept the law perfectly when tempted in all points as we are. We are asked to follow His example. It is possible for us to do so.

Robin, please let us keep to scripture.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.”

Russell writes:

“Dear Edgar, You write that Robin “seems to have avoided Pelagianism with its idea that we are capable of perfection by our own efforts.”

I don't think Pelagius held the idea that we are capable of perfection by our own efforts.

The core teaching of Pelagius was that mankind can avoid sinning and that we can freely choose to obey God's commandments with His help.

So do I take it that this is what you are referring to? You know I agree with this teaching of Pelagius and if this is what you are disagreeing with I wonder how you can defend your own position using scripture.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.”

Edgar writes:

Dear Russell, 1 John 1.8. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” If we claim to be sinless, we are self deceived and the truth is not in us. Would not this be a hint that if we claim that it is quite possible for us to be sinless we are self deceived.

With love in Jesus. Edgar”

Russell writes:

“Dear Edgar, Of course not. That is a non sequitur argument.

Only Jesus claimed to be sinless. But as He was tempted in all points as we are it follows that we too could have been sinless.

I have never yet heard of anyone who has dared to say that there is a commandment which they were not able to keep. So it follows that we can be sinless and that every sin we commit is our own fault and we have only ourselves to blame. Would God punish anyone for committing a sin which wasn't their fault? No.

Did Adam and Eve have to eat of the forbidden fruit? Of course not. Was Jesus tempted in all points as we are? Yes. Did He sin? No! Then we can avoid sinning too.

Why else is it necessary for us to be under grace? We should be very thankful to God that grace works within law.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.”

Robin writes:

“Russell, The scriptures I would use to make my case are many of the same ones you have already used to make yours. I don’t spend a lot of time quoting verses, though I know them quite well, because I have learned through the years how subject to interpretation they can be. Your view of what they say in this case is not unlike what mine used to be. I believe I see them more clearly now and try to give folks a new prism through which they can now make more sense. I am not disparaging the use of God’s word at all. I’m just telling you that the use of them won’t settle the views between us. Many of those you have already quoted would have been the very ones I too would have used to make my case.

Of course we have free will. But what we also have are influences that we have allowed to change not just what we do, but who we are. This thing that we so often refer to as evil human nature is not a fallen state of genetics or even simply a fallen state of mental capacity somehow. It is in our hearts and starts out as a change in our perception of reality in terms of how our own value is determined including that same dynamic between our Father and ourselves. It is a deep and hurtful psychological condition that has struck at the very desire for abundant living that is placed in our hearts.

Let me put it to you in real simple terms on a human level. Once you tell a young child that his or her essential value and lovability (justification) is dependent on what they know and do; and once the child “agrees with” or comes to “accept” or “believe” this; you now will have the death of the child as created, and dysfunction will ensue. If he/she continues in this course without help from a truly graceful parent or church, this perception will become firmly imbedded and will be the unconscious driver leading to all kinds of sinful and destructive behaviours. The free will we have must be exercised on a much deeper level than to just stop doing something wrong. We have free will to stop making these “agreements” as adults (which is what we actually should be doing in adult believer’s baptism). But because these unconscious drivers are so deeply imbedded, we are constantly fighting them. They are not easily uprooted... it takes time, and prayer, and faith, and work. Jesus helps us fight them and overcome them, however this healing power isn’t something magically poured into our hearts and minds. We have to want to be healed. Even sick people don’t necessarily want to be healed. God wants to first know you want it. This is scriptural. I’ll look it up if you want. But God will go with us into these deep, dark, and long avoided places, to help us heal. But he won’t go there without us.

You mentioned that if Jesus did it, we can, too. Well, the major difference is that Jesus never “agreed” with the conditions presented to him in the first place. He never let Satan or anyone else in this law-based world tell him that he didn’t “have what it takes.” He was a human being (albeit miraculously conceived) who was okay with being less than perfect, less than the God who alone is perfect. Because he maintained this trust, he was able to die a sinless man. None of us have done this, and we haven’t received much help from our orthodox Christian churches either. Our Christian churches won’t even allow for the fact that Jesus was fully human and not God to begin with. Thus they don’t and can’t teach the very path we must take in order to follow in his footsteps. The great religious institutions of this world block the escape from sin... especially our Christian churches.

I do agree with you, though, in one way, and perhaps it shows we’re not all that far apart. We do have free will to decide what we’re going to do, sin or not. It is our responsibility to choose. But the decision we must make goes much deeper than to do this or not do that. We, in partnership with God, must do a lot more on a deeper level in order that those behaviours can become more consistently right and healthy ones. Paul knew these things. No way was he saying that he was done battling the forces of evil in his life and even in his “flesh” (unconscious agreements). But he also knew that as long he stayed in the battle, there was no condemnation for the times he slipped and fell.

Russell, people need real help and God is willing to give it through Jesus and the gospel. I understand you think I should use more scriptural references, and perhaps I will. But though you quote lots of scriptures, your interpretation of them is a roadblock to freedom in Christ.

The grace of God worked for us who were under the law, to bring us out of the law. For us, grace does not work within law, as you state. We are not under the law, but under grace. We have a whole new foundation; it consists of grace and faith. We are under no condemnation as long as we operate in this

new belief system. Just as faith and works are mutually exclusive (“faith is not of works”), so too are grace and law mutually exclusive as Paul meant it. After conversion we live in an environment where the truest thing about us is not sin anymore. That’s because we are now innocent children again (if it is so that we believe)... sincere, transparent, and honest with our Father and with ourselves. We may trip and fall along the way, but we are no longer trying to hide behind some kind of self made masks of righteousness as we do. The true self is being bared to God and that is all a part of the deeper repentance and turning away from the false self that I’ve been talking about. We need to trust in the love of our Father, as Jesus did, and embrace our humanity. Trying to be more than human only causes us to be less than human. Let’s just try being plain human for a change... like Jesus did... and won the battle over sin and death.

Robin.”

Russell writes:

“Dear Robin, You wrote:- “I believe I see them more clearly now and try to give folks a new prism through which they can now make more sense.”

I humbly ask you, Robin, do you think it wise to give folks a new prism through which, you say, they can now make more sense?

I have tried looking through your “new prism” and I see such things as - “This thing that we so often refer to as evil human nature... starts out as a change in our perception of reality in terms of how our own value is determined including that same dynamic between our Father and ourselves.”

As God made no such thing as evil human nature I don’t see that your “new prism” can help anyone “make more sense.” And if you mean evil human beings, rather than evil human nature, then I don’t see how you can use the expression: “the same dynamic between our Father and ourselves.”

Then you continue with, “It is a deep and hurtful psychological condition that has struck at the very desire for abundant living that is placed in our hearts.”

So who placed this “very desire for abundant living” in our hearts? God? Satan? You? Me? And what is this “abundant living” you refer to? Sorry to be so dim, Robin, but you are not making much sense to me.

However, you raised my hopes when you said, “Let me put it to you in real simple terms on a human level.” (I am strangely curious to know what other level you could have used if not human). But these hopes were dashed when you went on to say that, “Once you tell a young child that his or her essential value and lovability (justification) is dependent on what they know and do...”

But I wouldn’t dream of telling a young child any such thing. Your “new prism” hasn’t been much help to me, nor do things become any clearer when you continue with, “and once the child “agrees with” or comes to “accept” or “believe” this; you now will have the death of the child as created, and dysfunction will ensue.”

Robin, I really do prefer Bible language to this. Shall I go on? Perhaps I had better not.

Nevertheless you do say:-

“I do agree with you, though, in one way, and perhaps it shows we’re not all that far apart. We do have free will to decide what we’re going to do, sin or not. It is our responsibility to choose. But the decision we must make goes much deeper than to do this or not do that. We, in partnership with God, must do a lot more on a deeper level in order that those behaviours can become more consistently right and healthy ones. Paul knew these things. No way was he saying that he was done battling the forces of evil in his life and even in his “flesh” (unconscious agreements). But he also knew that as long he stayed in the battle, there was no condemnation for the times he slipped and fell.”

I am pleased we are in some agreement here, but you are not using the term “flesh” in the way Paul used

it in his letter to Romans. I believe your “flesh (unconscious agreements)” is pure myth. But what is worse is that it destroys Paul’s message of no longer being in the flesh. Romans 8:9.

Yes, Robin, people do need real help and God has given us help in attaining what was impossible for us to attain on our own and He is willing to give us even more help day by day through Jesus and the gospel. But God also said “Come let us reason together.” And how are we to do that except by getting to know Him through prayerful study of the Scriptures. And Jesus said that His Father seeks people to worship Him in Spirit and in truth but how are we to this unless we know what the truth is? Looking at Christendom there would seem to be a thousand contradictory ‘truths’!

In the next post you talk of law but you do not say which law you are referring to. The two most obvious laws are of course the Law given to Moses and the Law of Sin and Death. But there are several others such as the law of the spirit of life.

The law of sin and death was instituted by God in Eden when He said to Adam “In the day ye eat thereof (sin) ye shall surely die” (the consequence – being put to death).

The ordinances of the Law of Moses were ended when Christ fulfilled the Law but the Ten Commandments are still binding and are embodied in the Sermon on the Mount.

For the faithful, the law that was done away with is the law of sin and death and this is because Jesus took Adam’s place in death so that faithful people of all dispensations are forgiven through His One Offering – “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin (singular) of the world.” That sin being the one sin of Adam. But the law is still there and for those who loose their faith and are ‘cut off’ the law of sin and death remains.

If we were not under law then we could not sin for “sin is transgression of law.” - 1 John 3:4, and that we are still under law is shown by Paul in Romans 10:8-10, “He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” Add to this that Jesus said “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” - John 13:34. Again Paul to the Galatians 6:2, “Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.” It would be helpful to state which law one has in mind.

You say that “The grace of God worked for us who were under the law, to bring us out of the law,” which is true of the Law of Sin and Death. That is why “there is now therefore no condemnation for them which are in Christ,” for being “in Christ” they “are not in the flesh” - Romans 8:9.

I therefore maintain that grace works within law; it is not above the law and it is not outside the law but it has ever been within the law and salvation has ever been by grace as it was for Adam and Eve and all their faithful descendants ever since. May be you would me to say that we are under grace because of the law of sin and death. The law has not been done away with but by grace we do not suffer the consequences.

Neither are faith and works mutually exclusive as Abraham showed. Certainly we read that “Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness” and then in James 2:18 “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”

I know you are not disparaging the use of God’s word and it seems most unlikely that the use of God’s word will settle the views between us, but at least it will help our readers to see more than one point of view. It is for each one of us to approach God in prayer to seek the answers, and to live lives acceptable to Him.

Robin writes:

Russell, We are no longer under the law, but under grace. This is the word of God through Paul to the Romans. Some thought he was saying that therefore we are not to be concerned about our behaviour. You seem to have the same concern. You have that concern because you don't understand Paul, nor me on this subject. James came from a different direction than Paul. Paul was talking about two completely different, mutually exclusive systems. One is grace and one is law. When we operate under grace we will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, which have their beginning and draw their power from the system of law. This is also why Paul said plainly, faith is not of works. It is also why he was able to so confidently say that Abraham was not justified by works. However, James was attempting to counter a movement that would twist the meaning of Paul's words. He was showing that works are an extension of our faith. And that is true. Works that truly fulfil any righteousness of God start from the position of grace.

The flesh Paul spoke of was simply those beliefs he had come to have by growing up in a society (world really) that bases a person's worth on knowledge and performance. You say that you would never tell such things to your kids. Good for you. But though most of us try to do that, and would certainly start off saying that we would never do such things, we do them through our eyes, our gestures, our words, and in a myriad of different ways. A child just wants to survive so he or she will change, try to be more lovable and valuable to the one whose opinion of him/her matters the most. This is not a “theory,” it is not something I've invented. It has been proven over and over again in thousands upon thousands of individual lives.

Paul was responding to drivers deep in his unconscious. Envy, jealousy, covetousness, hatred, adultery, all start in the heart. And the heart is where commitments, agreements, beliefs are formed. After conversion, Paul no longer was automatically responding to those unconscious drivers. The grace of God and the power of God were working in him so that he could now begin to respond according to trust and faith in a Father and a son who believed in him and his good heart. But he still struggled against those things that were so ingrained. His battle, his race, was not over, and would not be over until Christ returned or he died. He still had to make conscious choices to do right or wrong, but he also knew that he struggled against the forces of this thing he called ‘flesh,’ and slipped and fell. But because he now lived within the grace system, he was able to combat those forces of evil that fed off a law system of justification, and was constantly in a state of grace with God. He was not just forgiven; he was being restored, as the whole world would be, as he concluded in Romans 8.

People have come to Christian teachers, preachers, pastors, and counsellors for help to overcome sin in their lives. It has been a failing of a vast majority of these teachers to simply advise them to get with it, to buck up, stop doing wrong and start doing right, pray more, get in there and finish the race. And if someone says, but my leg is broke and I can't run, they simply say, well you are forgiven. Now get in there and finish the race. What help is this? None at all. But the plan of God is all about restoration, the restoring of our hearts, and the entire earth. Knowledge about the gospel and Jesus are a great beginning. But it is not enough. One must rightly apply this information, absorb it, and teach it properly as the healing mechanism it is meant to be. Simply to say, well we have the choice to do good or bad... now follow Jesus' example to do the good, is to discourage people and cut them off from an abundant life both now and in the age to come. Jesus was able to make those good choices for a very specific reason, and simply choosing one behaviour over the other was not that reason.

Russell, I advise you to be more practical and realistic, as well as more introspective. Your interpretation of what the bible is saying does not hit home to people struggling. It is very legalistic, and does not speak to the heart.

Robin.”

Linda writes:

“I sometimes think that we can misjudge the law because it wasn't kept by the legalists of Jesus' day. We look at their failures and think it was the law was no good. The legalists had the form of religion, but denied the power of it. If they had understood the scriptures they would have known that it testified of Jesus,

and they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. Jesus said to the Pharisees (Matt 15.3) – “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?” and v9 “They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” (Not God’s rules, but man’s rules)

As soon as self righteousness starts because of the supposed keeping of the law, I would see that as sin (the first commandment being violated). Law is meant to deliver us to grace. I don’t see them as mutually exclusive, nor faith and works as mutually exclusive. Paul said he would show his faith by his works. However we all know that it is possible to do the works but not have faith. I see an interaction between all these concepts - law/grace/faith/works (obedience) - love being the overarching “glue” that holds them all together.

We just can’t get past the fact that Jesus said – “If you love me, you will obey me,” and Matthew 19.17 – “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” Jesus then goes on to say which commandments he’s talking about.

Because we have a loving high priest as our lord and mediator, when we fail, he will forgive and restore us. This isn’t the same as saying that the commandments now have no value and are just law (legalism) delegated to the dustbin.

Love Linda.”

Robin writes:

“Linda, Yes, works are an outworking of faith. But Paul himself said that “faith is not of works.” What he was talking about were two mutually exclusive systems of how value, worth, lovability, and acceptance are determined. Using the Law of Moses as a microcosm of a larger, over-arching concept of knowledge and performance for justification, he was persuading many that the place to start an understanding of God and our relationship with Him (as well as our own perception of our value) is with grace. That’s where all (P)parents and children should start, but it was not where the first children started. They were misled, and believed what was suggested to them.

This is all completely different than saying our faith should lead to works and that we should obey. But it is the obedience of faith, not works. Grace and faith are one package deal... law and works are another entirely different package deal.

Robin.”

At this point Linda gave us links to two articles on other web sites relating to this topic and which all could read. Unfortunately they are too long to include here, however in response...

Robin writes:

“I am very familiar with this point of view. I lived in it solidly for 15 years myself. I learned it, taught it, preached it, ate and slept it. This view attempts to divide the Law of Moses into several groups. But a careful examination of scriptures does show that the Law of Moses included all of the ceremonial, sacrificial, civil, judicial, and moral laws given to Israel. It is a package, and as a package it has been done away and superseded by the law of Christ (which by the way, contains some of the same moral obligations, but comes at them from a “spiritual” starting place).

Robin”

Linda writes:

“Dear Robin,

I’m not in any way suggesting that by our obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ, we in some way deserve or earn salvation. By obeying Jesus because of our faith, we really are only doing what we ought to do now that He has redeemed us and we belong to Him. It is always by grace that we are saved.

You wrote: "It is a package, and as a package it has been done away and superseded by the law of Christ (which by the way, contains some of the same moral obligations, but comes at them from a "spiritual" starting place)."

Spiritual moral obligations - we can't obey in the spirit (that I can see) without obeying in "now time" in our life; e.g. how do we obey the commandment not to commit adultery spiritually if we go and do it in the flesh? At some point in a believer's life, we have to actually go out and physically live up to what Jesus tells us to do. If we disobey His commandments then we end up enslaved to sin with all its attendant consequences. Once we are believers, then Jesus by His Holy Spirit assists us to live the kinds of lives that He wants us to. If we fail but repent, He will forgive.

You said, "But it is the obedience of faith, not works." That's what I'm saying too. We need to know what to do, so we can obey it out of faith. When I look around the world today, I don't actually see many of the unfaithful obeying Jesus' commandments.

I still think the main problem is that people don't obey - this one for example - "Love one another as I have loved you." Commandments 6 to 10 give us practical ways of loving one another and God gives us the spirit to do this.

Robin, I'm just wondering, when you taught obedience to the commandments in the past, what was your belief about the Holy Spirit? Also, at that time, did you consider Jesus to be divine (not meaning the Trinitarian sense)?

It's just that I've noticed something in past, in my own church experiences, that the lower the Christology, and the belief that the Holy Spirit is somehow not working in believers today, then the less capable we are of obedience by faith (as opposed to working to earn salvation). I'm not saying we shouldn't bask in, and enjoy God's love. We do, and we should. Out of our received love, we can now love others. I'm always aware that Jesus died for us while we were still sinners. Now it's up to us to go out and do what He wants us to. The grace we have been given, is the grace we should now give.

I'm finding a kind of security in the 10 commandments. They are pretty clear as a base line. Keep the commandments in the "now time" in our practical life, and ask for the faith, hope and love, so that obedience is spiritual, not just practical. We do it out of love, which makes it an offering to God.

A Further thought: I would have thought that legalism (working your own way to salvation) would have been a violation of the first of the Ten Commandments.

Robin, I do understand that you've come from a legalistic background, as you have mentioned. It would have been crushing, relentless and hopeless. I'm really glad that you are out of that now. I too have experienced the relief from legalism, that fellowship and relationship with Christ has given. When I look back at my own religious past, I get most upset about the way I treated certain others as a result of being (temporarily) a legalist. It wasn't much fun being below other people's legalistic expectations, but when I remember that others at that time, had been below mine, it doesn't make me feel very good. We are all saved out of darkness and into the light of Christ. It is love of Him that turns our obedience into an offering to Him, rather than our deeds being an illusory stairway to heaven.

I had to actually get right out of the system and go to churches not at all associated with my religious past. If we think of the "moral obligations" as you describe them, are we so far apart when you say the law of Christ contains those moral obligations, and I say that the moral obligations are eternal (therefore continued from old to new - even from Adam and onwards).

P.S. There is a lot of depression caught up with the legalistic frame of belief. Sometimes it's hard to remember whether one's action or a behaviour rose from a legalistic mind set, or whether it was just the action of a depressed person. What a horrible tangled web. These are some of the wounds that Jesus heals.

Love Linda."

Russell writes:

“Dear Robin, I have read the two articles referred to by Linda in post 16 and agree with them both in principle, though I think that neither of them seem to see what we call “The Federal Principle.”

I particularly appreciated the conclusion of the one where the author refers to the “New Commandment” which Jesus gave us - to love one another as He has loved us. What was new was that Jesus did more than the law required of Him in giving His life for us and this is what He asks of us - to do even more than just keep the law!

These authors are far more eloquent than I am, so I rest my case.

With Love in Jesus. Russell”

In a separate e-mail, Linda sent me the following:-

“Dear Russell,

It seems to me that Romans Chapter 7 is a comparison between living under the law, and then living life in the spirit.

v4, “Likewise my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.”

The verses above equate living under the law as living in the flesh, sinful passions - we wouldn't have even known it as “living in the flesh,” or that they were “sinful passions” unless the law had told us so.

“What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

To be brought to repentance, we first need to be convicted of our sins. We need to know that what we are doing is wrong. We need to know what God declares to be sin. When we are convicted of sin, and repent and ask for forgiveness, then by His grace, we are forgiven by God through Jesus Christ.

There is a close connection between the law, sin, repentance, grace. We can keep the law all we like - perfectly if we could, but it still would not save us. It was the schoolmaster which brought us to grace in Christ.

Without the law, I don't see that we can have grace. If we aren't convicted of sin, then how can we be forgiven?

I don't actually see it a case of law OR grace. Rather through the law, we are brought to grace.

The struggle Paul describes is the living of the religious life trying to keep the commandments and failing - without living in the spirit. The endless grind of legalism - trying to earn salvation through the law (which was never the purpose of the law).

However, that endless grind has been broken – “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (v24) We can't do it on our own.

v25, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Jesus delivers us from the futile task of salvation by works - into salvation in Him, by grace.

v25, Paul's mind [spirit] serves the law of God [law of God is good]

Flesh serves the law of sin - i.e. (back to "While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death").

It's the process again - commandments broken = sin. This should have led to death but didn't because of God's work in Christ = grace.

Ch. 8 "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death."

Paul is talking about the state he was in before he found grace, in my opinion - until he found the real purpose of the law, which was to bring him to Christ.

Love Linda"

In conclusion:

I thank all who have responded to the request for feed-back on my article regarding Romans Chapter Seven. Perhaps the greatest help came from the person who asked "Why do you think your interpretation of this chapter is better than that of other's?" Not for any answers he gave for there were none, but that his question focused my mind on what I was trying to show as a better understanding of a portion of Paul's writings which have been so disputed by many.

The responses have served to highlight the need for a better understanding than those generally accepted where the difficulties have been glossed over.

Most respondents have appreciated that Paul is dealing with the change from the end of the Law of Moses to the beginning of salvation by Grace through faith in Jesus, but Paul was not addressing Jews only; he was addressing Gentiles also who were never under the Law of Moses. So it was not just the end of the Law of Moses that Paul had in mind but the end of the law of sin and death through Jesus having destroyed the power of the devil (i.e. the consequence of sin personified). This is the redemption which took place when Jesus died on the Cross. The salvation of all the faithful, past and future to that time, was dependant upon this one supreme act of Love of Jesus.

It is Linda's e-mail that is the most sympathetic to the case for "There is a close connection between the law, sin, repentance, grace. We can keep the law all we like - perfectly if we would, but it still would not save us. It was the schoolmaster which brought us to grace in Christ. Without the law, I don't see that we can have grace. If we aren't convicted of sin, then how can we be forgiven?"

I don't actually see it a case of law OR grace. Rather through the law, we are brought to grace... It's the process again - commandments broken = sin. This should have led to death but didn't because of God's work in Christ = forgiveness by the grace of God."

But I'm not sure that Paul felt he had failed to keep the commandments for he said he could boast as "touching the righteousness which in the law" that he was "blameless." - Philippians 3:6. What he had now learnt was that keeping the Law of Moses could not save him because he was not able to provide the price of redemption to buy himself back from sin's possession. Hence the need for Christ, whom he had been persecuting.

No one has mentioned the aorist tense which can make it difficult for translators, especially if they are biased towards certain views current to their time, and the difficulty remains of the anomaly of Romans 8:1 with relation to the previous dozen verses. How can those verses be put in the present tense when "therefore

now” of 8:1 puts them naturally into the past tense? And if they are in the past tense, how are we to understand them?

The suggested “interpretation” of them on page 12 of our last C.L. may need some improvement but the important thing is to go in the right direction. The question remains as to whether or not Paul is dealing with the changeover from the end of the Old Covenant to the beginning of the New or so far as Gentiles were concerned it would be the beginning of a new dispensation away from worldly lusts.

Unless we go along the suggested lines I feel we are left with Paul contradicting himself, followers of Christ remaining sold under sin and a translation sustaining the Original Sin doctrine.

Any further thoughts are most welcome.

Brother Russell Gregory.

Exhortation

My Dear Brethren and Sisters, Love and Greetings in Christ Jesus.

When I was more conversant with Christadelphians there was a common phrase used among us which, I believe, is still used, namely, “Are you in the Truth?” or “Before I came into the Truth,” and “since I came into the Truth” - a phrase which to one who knows them not to be “in the Truth” as consistently as they should be, is quite irritating to hear. It is a good thing to be “in the Truth,” but to think that we are when at the same time we are far from being in that excellent state of knowledge is an opinion formed without due consideration.

I once thought I possessed all the necessary knowledge of the way but discovered myself to have been deceived. It is true that they are “in Christ” who have received some knowledge as babes and been immersed, but this state is not sufficient for salvation. Our Lord, in His prayer (John 17) used these important words: “I in them and thou in me,” which is entirely another proposition. It is therefore possible, though being “in Christ,” that we have not reached the important stage if Christ being “in us.”

The Book of Revelation gives an account of an Ecclesia being “in Christ” but Christ being not “in them.” On the contrary He is standing at the door knocking and seeking admission. To be named as one of the Seven Ecclesias in Asia proves them to be “in Christ” but being wretched, blind and naked, without understanding, faith, and vision, they thought they possessed the Truth; they had need of nothing, being rich and able to provide for their poor, attending the sick, and ready to be burned for the sake of the Truth - yet they were poor, miserable, blind and Naked.

If we are really “in the Truth” we first learn that knowledge is the principal thing - we therefore strive to get it; “it is eternal life to know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ;” we must know more about Him and His Father than we know as Christadelphians. “God so loved that He gave” - without reproach, without demanding retribution for sin, and although death had no claim on Jesus He freely shed His life blood, a ransom for many.

In Christadelphian literature is said that God demanded retribution and Jesus suffered all the consequences of Adam’s sin - even the death that passed upon all men. These are things to be considered before we can truly boast of being “in the Truth,” and must be converted before Christ can truly be “in us.” We may try to copy Christ’s example, a thing quite possible, but He must first be “in us” by knowledge. When we come to learn of Christ and His Father His love floods our hearts with joy unspeakable, having opened our heart to allow the true Christ to come in and sup with us and we with Him.

Christ “in us,” the hope of glory; we live, yet “not I but Christ liveth in me;” we live it by faith upon the Son of God; we have found the Messiah which is called Christ.

We would like contention to cease; there are many Christadelphians whom we know and love and for whom we pray daily, and whom we believe to be contending for the Truth. Why go on contending for tradition; why add insult to the spotless Lamb of God by contending that He was sinful flesh and had blemishes?

Paul lay in prison filling up the measure of the affliction of Christ for his body's sake - but was dead; it was Christ who lay in prison, Christ in him. Many who did not know and believed in Christ preached Him for contention and strife, supposing to add affliction to His bonds. We may think that Christ's sufferings are over: but that voice from heaven we may hear saying, "Why persecutest thou me?" Although in heaven He was filled with mental grief and pity at the sight of those being dragged to prison and death.

Shall we add insult to injury by holding, in the least degree, that it was not wrong to crucify Him, because death was His just due? For holding such view we are thought to be eccentric and peculiar - but we are bought of Christ's eye salve, clean raiment and gold - why keep them outside and lose His indwelling presence?

We have seen it to be quite possible for a whole Ecclesia to be "in Christ" yet Christ not "in them" "I in them, thou in me," that they may as one, as we are one. It is our daily prayer that we may all come to the unity of the faith in the bond of peace.

With Fraternal Love, F. Skinner.

What is Christadelphianism?

History shows it to be its own victim of doctrinal contradiction and confusion.

Through the necessity of the circumstances which arose in America the name Christadelphian was formulated by John Thomas who must be complimented for his zeal to find the Gospel of Truth taught by the prophets through the God of Abraham and Moses but most of all the Son of God, Yahshuah the Christ. Who ascended up on high and gave gifts unto the men who had followed Him and His teaching by the Spirit of God.

John Thomas was a prolific writer on the subject of the way of salvation and the errors of the popular and established religions of Christendom yet in his own various books could be found mixtures of truth and error. I understand he emerged from an association of Campbellites and Calvinism from whom he finally separated through doctrinal differences and became friendly with a journalist named Robert Roberts, a man of heated temperament, unlike that of Dr Thomas. In introducing their booklet "Eureka at a Glance" by E.H.V. Williams and F. Bilton, Robert Roberts is quoted as saying (in 1869) he did not need to study the Holy Scriptures any further to find The Truth; he had gained it all from the writings of Dr Thomas.

One would think then that both Dr Thomas and R. Roberts would always be in full agreement on the basis of the inspired Word of God as it is recorded in the book of Genesis for example, but not so, for, while in 1869 they both refused baptism to David Handley of Malden on account of his belief in the apostate doctrine of Roman Catholicism, the very doctrine of defiled and sinful flesh, after the death of Dr Thomas in 1871, these very doctrines as expressed in Clause 5 of the B.A.S.F. became necessary for acceptance of Fellowship with the Christadelphians. Robert Roberts was responsible for this and other Clauses of the B.A.S.F. contrary to the Word of God and unexplainable by members of the Christadelphian community.

Due to his Calvinistic roots, Dr Thomas made many contradictory statements in his writings, some of which are expressed in our booklet "To The Law And To The Testimony" but of course this has been suppressed in many places with the warning that Christadelphian should not read it.

Regarding David Handley's theory in 1869 both Dr Thomas stated there was no evidence of it in the Scriptures, yet in 1873 R.Roberts revised his teaching and forced it upon those who feared to oppose him even though it was a betrayal of Dr Thomas's view that there was no change in the nature of Adam when he transgressed. But it was at this stage of Adam's transgression recorded in genesis that Dr Thomas failed to see that the Divine sentence upon Adam was judicial death and not as he stated "prevention of access to the Tree of Life and left to the limits of his created and corruptible nature and return to dust.

Unwittingly Dr Thomas confirms that there was no change in Adam's nature when he transgressed proving R.Roberts and Clause 5 to be a great error and obstacle to the true understanding of the Atonement and sacrifice of Christ as the substitute for Adam's penalty of judicial death by the shedding of blood

I think that the main theme of the teaching of Jesus is in His own words – "According to your faith be it unto you." So, in believing natural death and return to dust to be the penalty for Adam's sin and also passed upon you, then when you die that will be it, you still die a sinner having not passed from natural death to life. Baptism in the belief that your nature is condemned avails you nothing; it is still the same as before you were immersed, you are still under the Law of sin and death, the legal sentence you have rejected.

As with most readers of the Genesis account Dr Thomas also ignored that a day with Adam meant the evening and the morning, the first day – and not a thousand years. What God said as a result of the transgression did not involve death but continuance of natural life for a period of time – Genesis 3:12-19.

To sum it all up, both Dr Thomas and R.Roberts were mistaken. Dr Thomas, in that the penalty was prevention of access to the Tree of Life by exit from the Garden of Eden, and R.Roberts, that Adam could not die without a miraculous change to his nature to bring into effect the penalty for his sin, and worse still, added defilement to that nature which became known as Sinful Flesh transmitted to all his posterity including Christ the Son of God.

Unless natural death as a penalty for Adam's sin is rejected and its passing upon all men, then Christendom including Christadelphianism is left hopelessly in tatters. The words of Jesus will tell you this in John 5:24. His words are in the present tense, not prospective. One cannot pass from physical death to life while still alive as St Paul has proved in Romans 8:1,2 – that his position was a legal one from which he could be made free without dying physically. Why cannot all accept this teaching?

Phil and Rene Parry.

A Burdensome Stone for All People

Zechariah 12:3.

About a month ago, Jordan's King Abdullah II in a broadcast on Israel's Radio 2 said in an interview that prospects for Mideast peace are dwindling, and that a current window could represent a "last opportunity." He said, "We find ourselves at this very important crossroads ... that I do feel really is the last opportunity for peace for all of us."

This comes at a time when Syria is increasing its army infrastructure on border with Israel. While restricted by the UN in the number of troops it is allowed to deploy along the border, Syria has moved military infrastructure, including fuel depots, closer to the frontier. The Syrians have also built structures in the area that could serve as weapons stores and military bases. Also Jerusalem aimed harsh criticism at Russia for its decision to supply Syria with advanced missiles, including anti-aircraft missiles and new anti-tank missiles that can penetrate Western-made tanks.

Senior Israeli officials expressed concerns that the arms would be transferred to Hizbullah, warning that missiles that were supplied to Syria in the past got into the hands of the group and were used against Israeli Defence Force tanks during last summer's war in Lebanon.

Even the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has asked for "more freedom to confront Hizbullah" and would like a more aggressive mandate for its forces to engage Hizbullah on their own. Although after last summer's war in Lebanon and the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, UNIFIL was beefed up from 2,000 troops to more than 12,000 and received a mandate stipulating that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) be present during any incident involving Hizbullah in southern Lebanon." UNIFIL sometimes waits a long time before the LAF arrives at the scene of an incident.

(UNIFIL has troops from - Belgium, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Korea, Luxemburg, Malaysia, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania and Turkey).

Syria will not change its policies as demanded by some Western countries, a Syrian newspaper said Tuesday, hours ahead of a planned visit by EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

Javier Solana, the most senior EU official to visit Syria in two years, arrived in Damascus as part of a three-nation tour that has also taken him to Lebanon and Saudi Arabia to discuss the Lebanese political crisis.

Solana said in Lebanon that he hoped his upcoming Damascus visit would help spur positive relations between European countries and Syria. But he also added that Syria would have to change its behaviour. "In order to resume the relationship we have to have a frank and sincere discussion about things that can change... and we have to see how the behaviour of our friends in Syria may change," Solana said.

The West, and particularly the United States, has shunned Syria for its policies in the Middle East, particularly its involvement in Lebanese affairs, its support of militant Palestinian groups and alleged role in fuelling the insurgency in Iraq, all charges that Syria denies

Solana, who is on a mission to try and resolve the Lebanese crisis, will discuss what Syria can do to help find a settlement for Lebanon. Lebanon's US-backed government also accuses Syria of supporting the Hezbollah-led opposition

Another problem has arisen since the Palestinian Authority, on the 17th March, formed a coalition government between the two major political parties, Hamas and Fatah. The PA Chairman, Mahmoud Abbas, has been in a difficult situation since Hamas was unexpectedly voted into power by a vote of 83 to 3 yet has managed to form a 25 member Cabinet in which Hamas does not have an overall majority as there are five small parties also represented.

Israel will not have any dealings with Hamas as they are a terrorist organisation with the declared aim of destroying Israel. The Fatah Part however is in favour of peace with Israel and so is Abbas. The Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, has been having talks with Abbas with the aim of making a peaceable settlement between Palestinians and Israel but since the Hamas is a major player all talks of peace have ceased.

Meanwhile the US has been pushing the Saudis to re-launch their 2002 diplomatic initiative, and diplomatic officials said this initiative - and Israel's reaction to it - would figure prominently in the talks between Prime Minister Olmert and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who arrived in Israel on the weekend of March 24th just before a key Arab League summit in Riyadh

The original Saudi plan in 2002 called for a full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines, including in Jerusalem and on the Golan, and the establishment of a Palestinian state in return for normal ties with the Arab world. Another version of the plan adopted by the Arab League in Beirut later that year called for the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, has made it clear that Israel could not accept the initiative if it included a call for the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, and Jerusalem has been receiving mixed messages regarding whether this clause would be dropped.

Earlier, King Abdullah met with US President George W. Bush and Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice in Washington where he urged officials in a speech to the US Congress to quickly take the lead in creating conditions for a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians. "The goal must be a peace in which all sides gain," he said. "There must be a peace in which Israelis will be part of the neighbourhood."

At a press conference, the Hamas leader, Khaled Mashaal was asked if Hamas had now recognized Israel. Mashaal did not answer directly, but said: "The Palestinian government insists on June 4, 1967 borders (for Israel), full Palestinian sovereignty with Jerusalem as its capital." The question arose after a statement by Mashaal during a meeting in Teheran with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahamdinejad when he said that Israel will "disappear Israel will eventually disappear from the world, and the Palestinians should be prepared for that."

Mashaal also extracted from Iran a pledge to fund his Palestinian movement to compensate for the West's financial blockade of the Palestinian Authority government.

Four days after Hamas stunned the world by their victory in the PA parliament representatives of the Quartet met in London to discuss the situation in the Middle East. That meeting was attended by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana, the European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Ursula Plassnik, the foreign minister of Austria, which at the time held the EU's rotating presidency.

At the end of the meeting Kofi Annan read out the Quartet's statement that included the following: "It is the view of the Quartet that all members of a future Palestinian government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map."

While the Middle East that has gone through one war and the various diplomatic manoeuvres of the last 15 months there has been a single constant: The Quartet's three conditions that a Palestinian Authority government needs to accept to gain international legitimacy and funding, and while countries like Russia, France, Italy, Spain and Finland have already said they would like to see flexibility in these conditions, it is worth remembering that since the conditions were first enunciated on January 30, 2006, there has been concern that they would soon be thrown by the wayside. The US has made it clear, "Our position has been consistent, which is, you need a Palestinian government that is going to, in fact, abide by the Quartet conditions" a spokesman said.

The Israeli Cabinet had already overwhelmingly approved Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's call to boycott the new Palestinian unity government. Nineteen ministers voted in favour of Olmert's position and two, voted against.

While Israel will accept most of the 2002 peace offer it is the matter of returning Palestinian refugees that they will not accept. And the position at the time of writing this is that the Saudi Foreign Minister has said the peace plan could change "that Arab leaders would be willing to consider changes in their 2002 peace offer to Israel to make it "compatible" with new developments." "It is expected from us to take notice of new developments, which require additions and developments in whatever is offered for our leaders about the issues and problems - in order for their resolutions to be compatible with what is dire and new," al-Faisal said.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is believed to have been strongly pushing the Arab countries to offer some hope of changes in the plan, during her tour of the Middle East this week.

The Israeli Deputy Prime Minister, Shimon Peres and Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat were in Tokyo in the middle of March to talk about details of Japan's proposed "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity," an economic revival plan aimed at boosting Middle East economy. Also attending was Farouk Kasrawi, special advisor to Jordan's King Abdullah II.

"I think Japan has taken us to the future with their vision," said Erekat. "This is an incentive of how things would look if Palestinians and Israelis would reach peace." Senior Israeli and Palestinian officials applauded the Japanese plan calling it a step toward rejuvenating the Middle East peace process. Under the plan, Japan will work with Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians to promote joint projects such as an agro-industrial park in the West Bank and facilitate the transportation of goods in the region.

"Jordanians, Palestinians and Israelis, we shall work together. This is the first time in the Middle east that such an economic cooperation takes place" Peres said.

Japanese Foreign Minister later held a meeting between the three leaders aimed at improving trust and cooperation.

However, one commentator said "I am sure the Japanese have good intentions but there is something that they do not understand. The problem is that the Arabs in these territories are less interested in their own well-being and prosperity than they are in destroying enemies. It is a problem of intention, which no plan can change"

Compiled from Internet sources.