

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No 241

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Editorial

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends,

Loving Greetings, One of the parables of Jesus related in Luke 12:32-48 concerns treasure, a thief, a wedding feast and a homecoming.

Jesus uses these every day images to draw some unusual comparisons as well as imparting some unexpected lessons for those ready to listen to him.

Jesus begins with a wonderful promise "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom....." A few verses on we are told about the surprise of a master returning home unexpectedly after the Marriage feast. Will he catch his servant sleeping rather than keeping watchful guard? Then there is the person who possessed great wealth, but woke up one day to discover that a thief had carried it all off. What does this say to us about the Kingdom? The treasure God offers is of far greater value than any earthly treasure and more secure. But it is possible to lose this treasure if we do not guard what has been entrusted to us by God. What is this treasure? God offers us a relationship with Him as his sons and daughters and the promise of eternal life as well. The image Jesus uses here is a great wedding feast in which the master honours his guests by seating them and personally waiting on them himself. This parable also contains a lesson in faithfulness and a warning against sloth. Faithfulness is very important to God for it is the foundation for any lasting and meaningful relationship. Faithfulness or fidelity allows us to persevere in living out an unswerving commitment. We know that Jesus is committed to us in a bond of unbreakable love and fidelity; because of his love and commitment to us He willingly laid down His life for us. A bond is a covenant and it means keeping one's word, promise and commitment no matter how tough or difficult it gets. Faithfulness is a key character trait of God and one he expects of us. Thankfully God gives the grace and strength to be faithful and he also rewards faithfulness.

Faithfulness and fidelity in any form is very unfashionable today probably because it can be demanding and difficult. Modern society extols freedom over fidelity and doesn't want to be bound to an unknown or uncertain future. It is also inconvenient and a barrier to the pursuit of one's own interests.

If we want to pass on our faith then we need to first be faithful models to those around us. Faithfulness demands consistency and a determination to stay the course. The joy and privilege of being a son or daughter of God carries with it a tremendous responsibility. We are expected to make good use of the gifts and graces He gives to us. The more he gives the more he requires. We see this plainly in what was expected of Jesus as the only begotten son and heir to all things. No one was more faithful than Jesus. The

temptation while the Master is away is to put off for tomorrow what we know the Master expects us to do today. As the old Spiritual says “keep your eyes on the prize and keep soldiering on.”

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.”

Love to all. Helen Brady.

EXHORTATION

Recommended reading – Romans 14

Dear Brethren and Sisters, - We have read this morning a portion of a very long and argumentative Epistle, written by the Apostle Paul and addressed to the saints in Rome. The Epistle contains very much of a doctrinal character and some things hard to be understood, but it also contains a great deal in the way of practical exhortation. And I am sure you will agree with me that it is very desirable, when we stand up to exhort one another, that our remarks should take a practical turn, and that we should not confine ourselves to matters of exposition.

In the 14th chapter of this epistle, which we have just been reading together, reference is made by the Apostle to differences which had arisen among the disciples of that ecclesia in Rome, and his object was to instruct the brethren as to the way in which they ought to conduct themselves with regard to the questions in dispute. You are doubtless aware that for some few years the Christian Churches were composed exclusively of believing Jews, and it was the introduction of the Gentile element which caused many differences to arise, which were previously unknown among them. The Jews, under the Mosaic order of things, had been accustomed to eat only certain kinds of meat, and to refuse others which were regarded as unclean by that law, while the Gentiles believed they might eat all things indifferently. The Jews again esteemed certain days to be holy, whereas the Gentiles looked upon all days as alike.

In the first verse of this fourteenth chapter the Apostle speaks of certain as “weak in the faith,” not weak in faith but weak in the faith, the weakness in question having no reference to any doubt existing in the minds of such as to the things constituting the one faith, but to abstinence from meats. Had it been otherwise the Apostle could not possibly have counselled the brethren to receive such weak ones among them. All were equally “in the faith,” but some were denominated “strong,” and others “weak,” not in relation to the things concerning the Kingdom of God, which, says the Apostle, “is not meat and drink,” but in reference to abstinence from meats and the observance of certain days. We perceive, then, that such weak brethren were to be received, and their infirmities borne by those who were strong, as the Apostle exhorts in the first verse of the fifteen chapter. Receive them, says he, though not for the purpose of disputing with them about their peculiarities, but give them the right hand of fellowship, receive them among you as brethren in the Lord, meet with them at the Lord’s table and despise them not, for God hath received them. Neither constitute yourselves their judges, for they stand or fall to their own Master, and God is able to make them stand. Thus tenderly and considerately were these weak brethren to be dealt with, but specially were the strong admonished not to put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall in a brother’s way, for while there was nothing that was unclean of itself, yet to him esteeming anything to be unclean, to him it was unclean. To induce a brother, therefore, partake of anything which he felt in his conscience was wrong, was to cause him to fall into sin, and even to incur the risk of destroying one for whom Christ died.

But the great question for us to consider in these days is the practical application of these exhortations to ourselves as individuals, and as a community of brethren holding the same faith, looking for the same blessed hope, and expecting the fulfilment of the same great and precious promises. We are not like the saints in Rome, a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles. We are not troubled by the coming in among us of disciples from among the Jews, who, from having been long disciplined in the peculiarities of the Mosaic code, retained all the prejudices of the Jew against the Gentile, whom they were accustomed to regard as dogs. Our case is far otherwise: we are all Gentiles, with scarcely an exception, though, having believed the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, we have thereby become the spiritual seed of Abraham, and Jews in the higher or better sense.

The exhortations of the Apostle as to meats and days come home to us in this way. From time to time we are brought into contact with those who, being “weak in the faith,” make it a matter of convenience to abstain from certain kinds of meat, swine’s flesh, for instance, and how shall we deal with such? Precisely as the Apostle Paul counselled the Christians at Rome in his day. Receive them into fellowship, avoid any strife of words about their peculiarity, respect their conscientious scruples, pass no condemnation upon them, and, above all, be careful to do nothing to cause them to defile their conscience by partaking of that which they feel to be a sin, remembering the words of the Apostle that, “to him who esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean,” To give a homely illustration of our meaning: Suppose we invited such an one to partake of our hospitality, should we not be walking uncharitably (or not according to love) if we placed the “unclean” article upon the table? Might not he, under such circumstances, be induced to partake, and thus be made to defile his conscience? Surely such a course would not be following “after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” “All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, neither to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.” These admonitions are comprehensive and far reaching, and place before us a great principle of action by which we are to regulate our conduct in our intercourse one with another, not only in the matter of food and drink, but as to our entire behaviour. Our example is either for good or for evil, and not one of us can pass through life without more or less influencing our fellows. Our influence may be small, but let us take care to exert it in the right direction. What would be our feelings did we know that our example had been the means of causing a brother to take the first false step in a downward course which ultimately led to his making shipwreck of the faith? Let us carefully avoid the very first approach to anything which our conscience tells us is wrong, and at once turn away from it. “Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.”

The kingdom of God, as preached, by Jesus and His Apostles, understood and believed, will not lead a man to suppose that he can commend himself to the Almighty by abstinence from meats, which indeed are to be received with thanksgiving of them who believe and know the truth (I Timothy 4:3), neither will it lead him to the practice of asceticism, or austerity; these are not its fruits, but, on the contrary, the results which flow from a hearty belief of the things promised in the Gospel, are as enumerated by the Apostle, “righteousness and peace and joy in a Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men.”

Then again, with regard to the observance of days. There are those who needlessly offend their neighbours and prejudice their minds against the truth by doing things on the first day of the week, for instance, which though not evil in themselves are so looked upon by many who consider that the Sunday should be observed somewhat in the same way as the Jews observed Saturday, which was their Sabbath. A Christian may lawfully do that on the first day of the week which he feels assured in his own conscience is harmless, yet if he thereby offends another or puts a stumbling block in his way, he should abstain on the principle laid down by the Apostle in this same epistle, that “every one is to please his neighbour for his good to edification, even as Christ pleased not Himself.” He is to be our example in all things, for He has bought us with a price, and we are His servants or bond-slaves and not our own, and whether we live or die we are His. While we are under no yoke of bondage in the matter, it is doubtless good to rest on the first day of the week, and to submit to the institutions of the powers that be, and under whom our lot is at present cast, so long as they do not conflict with the commands of God.

Thus I think you will perceive that, though these exhortations of the Apostle Paul were addressed so many centuries ago to believers whose circumstances were in several respects so different to our own, they are nevertheless applicable to ourselves, and that the principles on which they are based being unchangeable, are as binding upon us today as they were on the saints in Rome in the first century.

Brother S. G. Hayes.

MEPHIBOSHETH

There is no doctrine that so powerfully helps one to maintain his separation from the world as this hope of the Lord's return. During the time of King David's exile, when a usurper reigned in Jerusalem, we read of at least one man in the city whose heart was true to the absent King. That was Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth.

Where the King had gone he could not follow, for he was lame in both feet. But his heart was ever with him beyond Jordan. He might have made a name for himself by joining the side of Absalom, and then biding his time till the house of Israel restored to him the kingdom of his father (2 Samuel 16:3). Absalom was moreover a goodly man; and there was beauty in him that men should desire him; and he had promised reforms in the government that would satisfy everybody. (2 Samuel 14:25, 15:1-6). Would it not be better to settle down and accept his rule, and join in the general rejoicing?

Not so, reasoned Mephibosheth, for there was another King whose right it was to reign, one who had shown to Mephibosheth the "kindness of God," causing him to even eat bread continually at his table as one of the King's sons. And now that the King's inheritance was in the hands of another, Mephibosheth at least would not help to divide the spoils. Nay, rather, so long as the King was absent, and rejected, he would find his truest joy in having fellowship with him in his sufferings, whilst longing for the day of his return.

And so he neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes from the day the King departed until the day he came again in peace. And when he did come at last, and the night of weeping ended, Mephibosheth found his Joy and satisfaction not in considering his own exalted state, but in beholding the joy and satisfaction of his King. What though during these times of trial Mephibosheth's name had been slandered and his life misjudged? What though a treacherous servant had robbed him of half his goods?

"Let him take all" cried Mephibosheth, for indeed nothing now was of any account in comparison with the joy of seeing the King again in peace in his own house.

And surely for us in these last days this story tells its lesson. For there is another King, one Jesus (Acts 17:7), the One whose right it is to reign. He is in a "far country," an outcast from the world, and in His absence the world is making spoil of His inheritance. But He too has His Mephibosheths. They are out of tune with the present age, and out of touch with the spirit of this age altogether. They live in the past and in the future. "Oh what joy for us to win Life to serve this King from heaven."

(To read the history of Mephibosheth, see 2 Samuel 9:1-13, 16:1-4, 19:24-30, and 21:1-7)

A.H.Broughton.

TREES OF THE BIBLE - continued from C.L.240

Another tree much valued by the Israelites was the almond. It was the earliest harbinger of spring, bursting into blossom in late January, before its leaves appeared. The fruit is a great favourite, it can be eaten green before the shell hardens, and when ripe, is used as a sweetmeat. Its oil is also highly prized. Its fruits were also used as a model when designing the golden candlesticks for the Tabernacle, "And in the candlestick shall be four bowls like unto the almond".

Almonds were included in the present Jacob sent to Joseph in Egypt. He instructed his sons to carry down to Joseph a present, a little balm, a little honey, spices, myrrh, nuts and almonds. A present no doubt appreciated by Joseph for the almond does not flourish in Egypt.

When trouble arose among the leaders of the twelve tribes in the wilderness, Moses was instructed to take rods, one for each tribe, and lay them before the testimony in the house of meeting. These must have been from the almond tree for we read "on the morrow Aarons rod had budded and brought forth buds and blossom and bore ripe fruit", thereby dispelling any idea of fraud by Moses that he had removed Aaron's rod

and substituted another, for to bear fruit, blossom and buds was an impossibility in the natural order of things.

The great cedars of Lebanon come into focus again when we move on to the building of Solomon's temple. From the details given in the book of Kings, although the - outer walls of the temple were made of stone, it was necessary to line its interior with timber to facilitate the ornamental carvings overlaid with gold. In chapter 6 we read "and there was cedar on the house within, carved with knops and open flowers, all was cedar, there was no stone seen. And the whole house was overlaid with gold until the whole house was finished." Considering the size and the complexity of the temple it is amazing to read that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was building. I very much doubt whether any of our modern construction companies would undertake such an erection under these restrictions. In the Holy of Holies Solomon had carved two cherubim with out-spread wings to cover the Ark. These cherubim were carved not from cedar or acacia but from olive wood, a tree frequently used in reference by the prophets as a figure of righteousness, individually and collectively. Entirely appropriate when we consider that the cherubim are the guardians of the tree of life and the spiritual truth. The Psalmist refers to them "as bearers for the Lord God Almighty", and again, "I called upon the Lord and he heard my voice, and he rode upon a cherub and did fly", and in a later Psalm, "give ear, oh Shepherd of Israel, that sitteth between the cherubim and shine forth."

Throughout the scriptures trees are used illustratively of rulers and nations, whether they thrive and bring forth fruits, or whither and are cut down. When the wrath of the Lord was turned against the King of Assyria, Isaiah prophesied that the glory of his forests would be consumed and his fruitful field, both body and soul. "Behold, the Lord of Hosts shall lop the boughs with terror and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down and the lofty shall be brought low. And He shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron."

And Daniel records Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a mighty tree cut down, and the interpretation. The tree represented the King in all his might, but when he became boastful, personally claiming the glory for his achievements, the Lord punished him, making him no better than a beast of the field.

When we turn our attention to the Israelites, the Lord's chosen people, we find references to a particular tree, the olive tree. Rather appropriate when we consider the importance of the olive to their every-day existence, for it provided oil for cooking and lighting, was useful as a medicament and for anointing the body, keeping the skin moist through the heat of the summer, and also as a salve on bruises and wounds. A single olive tree could supply a whole family with fat for a year. The tree also provided some welcome shade and its wood was the main source of fuel. Indeed, many eastern Mediterranean nations recorded their wealth by the abundance of the olive harvest. The olive trees were part of the bounty of the land of Canaan promised to the Israelites. "And it shall be, when the Lord shall bring you into the land, which He swore unto your fathers, Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee, great and good cities which thou buildest not, and houses full of good things which thou fildest not, and cisterns hewn out which thou hewdest not, and vineyards and olive trees which thou plantest not, and thou shalt eat and be full." (Deuteronomy 6:10).

The olive tree was the first to bring new hope to Noah and his family in the Ark, when the dove returned with an olive leaf. This tree with the vine is linked throughout the Old Testament with the house of Israel and the blessing of the Lord. Jeremiah records, "the Lord of Hosts had planted thee a green olive tree, fair with good fruits." And again, in Hosea, "I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall blossom as a lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive tree." The oil was also used for anointing kings, and was used by Samuel to anoint Saul and, later David.

Reading through the scriptures we find the olive tree is synonymous with spiritual righteousness, and as we move into the New Testament we find reference to the grafting into the olive tree of new shoots as the gospel of salvation is preached to the nations. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, wrote, "Thou, being a wild olive, was grafted in among them and did become partaker with them of the root of the fatness of the olive tree." This is rather unusual, for here we have a wild olive being grafted onto a good tree, the reverse of the natural run of events where grafts are taken from a selected fruitful olive and grafted on to less fruitful stock, thereby increasing the harvest.

Herein is shown the merciful grace of the Lord, as Paul puts it to the Ephesians "God, being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ. By grace ye have been saved. That ye were separated from Christ,

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye that were once afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:12).

What man is unable to do, God is easily able to achieve, and does so through Jesus Christ His Son.

The olive tree provided a setting for other momentous events in the time of our Lord. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, that He retired from His disciples, to commune with His Father shortly before His arrest. It was on this same mount that His disciples witnessed His ascension into Heaven.

There is another hint of grafting in when we come to Christ’s words “I am the true vine and my Father is the Husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit... I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit, for apart from me ye are nothing.” With grafting there is a blending together, a closeness, and integration, and without it the graft does not take and the scion withers and dies, but the good graft will develop, taking its vigour from the main stock to the benefit of both.

This bonding to the true vine in Christ is essential to our salvation, for the fruits which we produce now are to the glory of God, as Paul wrote to the Romans “When ye were servants of sin, ye were free in regard to righteousness. What fruits then had ye at that time, in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of all things is death. But now being free from sin, and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification and in the end, eternal life.”

The fig, another fruitful tree of the eastern Mediterranean, appears very early in the scriptures for we are told Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to make aprons to cover their nakedness. An obvious sign of disobedience.

The fig also was counted as part of the abundance of the land of Canaan, for the spies Moses had sent into the land came back with branches bearing clusters of grapes, pomegranates and figs. In Deuteronomy, where the land is referred to as a good land, “a land of brooks of water and fountains and depths springing forth from the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates and olive oil and honey.

Whilst the Israelites were an obedient nation their fig tree brought forth plentifully, but when they departed from the way of the Lord, their fig trees dropped their young figs. The fig tree is rather unique in that it produces two crops in the year. The first young figs appearing in March and then the leaves. Many of these early figs do not reach maturity being easily blown off in gusty weather conditions. Those that do not fall reach maturity in early June and are especially esteemed for their delicate flavour. The prophet Micah writes, “My soul desireth the first ripe fig.” In June the main crop begins to form and steadily grows to produce mature figs in August.

Whereas the olive tree stands for the spiritual Israel it would appear that the fig represents natural Israel, which give the explanation of Christ’s curse on the unfruitful fig tree shortly before His arrest and crucifixion. As the Pass-over is early in the year, our Lord would not have expected to pick mature fruits as we are told in the narrative “the time of figs was not yet”, but He would have anticipated picking the young delicate fruits, and to see evidence of a greater harvest later. But as we read in Mark’s account “and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves. He came if haply He might find anything thereon, and when He came to it He found nothing but leaves, and cursed it, causing it to wither.” It was the want of promise of future fruitfulness in the nation that was condemned in the parable of the fig tree. Natural Israel was shortly to condone the putting to death of God’s Son, saying, “His blood be upon us and on our children”. Until our Lord’s return they will remain barren and then will He make Himself known to them and they will acknowledge their guilt and repent. And God will again bless Israel and make them fruitful once more. “And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn as one mourneth for his only Son,” and, “I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and keep my judgements. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field.” And from Joel, “For the tree beareth fruits, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord, for He giveth you the former rain in just measure. He causeth to come down for you the rain, the former rain

and the later rain in the first month. And the floor shall be full of wheat and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.” (Joel 2:23).

The Palm tree. According to Josephus, the palm tree was plentiful in the land, covering the Jordan valley from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. For the Jews the palm had both practical usefulness and symbolic significance. Its Hebrew name is Tamar, and symbolises grace and elegance. A single trunk rising up to a hundred feet topped with a crown of fan shaped leaves beneath which hang clusters of succulent dates. This is a particularly valuable plant for it provides starch, sugar, oil, wax, and fruit, and its leaves are suitable for weaving into mats and containers. Paper and thread are made from its fibres and liquor is extracted from its sap. When viewed in the desert it indicates water. We read that the Israelites in their travels came to Elim where there were twelve wells of water and three score and ten palm trees.

Its large feathery leaves were used as emblems of victory and triumph. When our Lord entered Jerusalem, riding on the colt, the people took palm leaves and strewed them in the way. Carvings of these trees were used to adorn Solomon’s temple, and again appear in the details of Ezekiel’s Temple “The space above the door even unto the inner house and without, and by all the walls round about within and without by measure. It was made with cherubim and palm tree, and the palm tree was between cherub and cherub, every cherub had two faces, so there was the face of a man towards the palm tree on one side, and the face of a lion on the other side, and thus was it made through all the house. And the door to the sanctuary cherubim and palm trees like as were made on the walls.” The juxtaposition of the cherubim and palm tree emphasises the sacredness of this tree and it has persisted through the ages up to our present time. Modern Jewry waves palm leaves in their synagogues today when celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. Palm leaves will be waved as a sign of triumphant rejoicing in the new Jerusalem “for after these things I saw and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all the tribes, and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb arrayed in white robes and palms in their hands. And they cried with a great voice, saying, “Salvation unto our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb.”

With our Lord’s return peace and righteousness will be established and desecration of the land will cease, as recorded in Micah, “In the latter days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains and it shall be exalted above the hills, and all people shall flow unto it. And he shall judge between many people and reprove strong nations afar off and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken it.”

Here we have come full circle from the righteousness in the Garden of Eden to the righteousness in the kingdom. With the Holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. “And the river of the water of life, bright as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb. And on this side of the river and on that, the trees of life, bearing twelve manner of fruit and yielding its fruits every month, with its leaves for the healing of the nations.”

It is up to us now to take note of the admonitions we read earlier in the chapter from Isaiah, “Incline your ear and come unto me. Hear and you shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace, the mountains and hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Brother Jeff Hadley.

Buried Treasure

There are a few sayings, parables and stories by Jesus about buried or hidden treasure.

One of them is about how someone finds something of great value and sells all that he has in order to acquire the land with the hidden treasure. It’s a message about someone who gave up everything in order to take hold of the treasure he had found hidden in the “earth”.

But there are two intriguing stories about a man who is given something of value and who then buries it.

The two stories are similar and some scholars have argued that they are simply two different accounts of the same story, remembered differently by the Gospel-writers. In my opinion, they are two similar, yet different stories, spoken around the same time but with slightly different details and possibly a slightly different message.

Matthew tells the story of the ‘parable of the talents’ (25:14-30) as a parable about the kingdom of heaven; and Luke has a similar ‘parable of the pounds [or, *minas*]’ (19:11-27) “because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (v. 11).

In both stories a man travels into a far country, and before going, he divides some money amongst his servants (in Luke’s story they each receive one *mina*, and in Matthew’s they receive a varying number of ‘*talents*’). When he returns he calls them all to account to see how they have done. He commends the servants who have traded or invested well, and condemns one servant who did nothing with the *mina* or *talent* he was given. In Luke’s story the last servant to give account says he *hid* the money wrapped in a handkerchief, (actually, it is his “sweat cloth,” which being pessimistic and lazy, he had no use for), while in Matthew’s story the last servant reports how he *buried* it in the ground. He froze his Lord’s assets, under the illusion that he was actually doing his Lord’s bidding, by “preserving” what his Lord had given him.

Both stories end with the owner of the money reprimanding the ‘lazy’ servant and telling him he ought to have at least put the money in the bank so the Master’s gracious gift could have gained some interest.

The point of both stories is fairly obvious - we ought to put the talents, resources and opportunities we have been given to good use so that they produce something worthwhile for our Master.

In both stories the Master shows that he is delighted by a ten-fold increase, or even a doubling of what he has given on trust, but that he is extremely annoyed to simply receive back what he has entrusted. In Matthew’s story the ‘lazy’ servant argues that he has kept ‘safe’ what he has been given. Both stories have this servant saying “I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed [Matt and Luke], and collecting what you did not deposit [Luke]”.

There are two important things to note here. First we should note the attitude of the various servants to their Master. Then we should note the attitude of the ‘lazy’ [Matt] or ‘wicked’ [Lk] servant to what was entrusted to him.

The lazy servant says “I knew you to be a hard man ...” John Wesley, in his *Notes on the New Testament*, observes that “he never knew Christ, who thinks him to be a hard Master”. This is a valuable observation. The servant who said “I knew you ...” was the servant who didn’t know his Master at all.

Isn’t it interesting, that it is to *this* class of person who claims to “know Jesus” as a “hard, austere man” that Jesus says, “Depart from me, I never KNEW you!!” (see Matt 7:23).

On the other hand, the other servants put to good use what had been entrusted to them and produced outstanding results. In one story they doubled their money, while in the other they increased it 5 or 10 times!

Grace multiplies abundantly once it is shared.

These servants didn’t produce such a good return on their investment by good luck. They too had observed their Master over the years, noted how he’d produced amazing results (apparently “reaping where he had not sowed”), and no doubt they had used some of the same gracious manners and methods they’d observed in their successful and prosperous Master. They were ultimately successful because they had *imitated* their Master.

The lazy servant didn’t know his Master, nor did he know what was in his hand. Rather than see its potential to achieve some wonderful results, he saw it as an onerous responsibility, a burden to be carried.

Rather than see it as life-giving (when the Master said he wanted to see his money back “with interest,” the Greek literally means “*with children*,”) the lazy servant saw the gift shared with him as something to be “wrapped up” and “buried”. He mummified it!

What are we doing with whatever it is God has graciously entrusted to us? Do we see them as talents, resources and opportunities which can produce amazing and outstanding results if only we imitate our Master’s manners and methods? Or do we see it as something to be “preserved” and then handed back “intact” when we are called to account.

We hear people speak of “preserving the Truth” as though all we have to do is to make sure nothing ever changes. Sadly, these people often fight hard to make sure that creeds, dogmas, statements of faith, and other expressions of “the faith” are preserved “intact” and that any challenge to them is resisted and put down.

It is amazing that these creeds, statements of faith, agreements etc. somehow seem to have more authority than the God of the Bible. (*Look at what the prophet says about these “idols” made by man’s hands and/or intellect - cp Isa 44:14-20 – and ask yourself “where does paper come from” in the light of what Isaiah says here.*) As Donald Bridges says in his book, “Jesus, The Man and His Message” page 17, “It is Christ who saves us... **not** our statements about Him.”

We sometimes hear people, especially in the minority ‘splinter’ groups, boast that they are the closest things to “original Christianity” and that nothing with them has changed in XYZ years. If this is what God wants then He doesn’t really need anyone to help Him - He can bury it in the sands (like the Dead Sea scrolls) and preserve it for as long as He wants.

But God hasn’t called us to “preserve” His gracious “truth” - He has called us to put it out there, show it and share it so that it can produce children! He has called us to exercise faith, to take risks, to look for challenges and “marketing” opportunities. The Grace of Christ is robust, not a “hot-house violet,” it is made tough to go out into the market place of life, and He has empowered us to liberally trade with it, to share it abundantly, without fear or favour.

Jesus was ‘counter-cultural’ – are we?

If the Master in these stories wanted to take the “safe” way, then he would have put his money in the bank. But instead, he put it in the hands of men who knew him and whom he trusted would follow his example.

It is often the people who think they know the most *about* Christ who are the ones who know Him the least. Like the lazy/wicked servant they *think* they know Him, but by their failure to follow His example, to use His methods and to **have a heart for the things, and for the people, for which he has a heart**, they demonstrate that they never knew Him at all.

As Jesus said in another place, in Mat 12:36, “But I say unto you, that every **idle** word (*Grk “pernicious, hurtful, unfruitful, not producing good, neither is it calculated to do so”*) that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.”

This last sentence contains words of suitable warning for all those who would claim to know Jesus. Perhaps literally this verse should read, “For by **your** reasoning (*about me – Jesus – remember Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, who He identifies as Spiritual Abusers, when He calls them “a generation of vipers”*) you shall be justified, and by **your** reasoning (*about me – Jesus*) you shall be condemned.” Remember in the parable recorded in Luke, Jesus says (*speaking as the Master in the parable*) to the sloth, “Out of **your own** mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant” (cp Luke 19:22)

The sloth’s “legalistic & uncompassionate” reasoning about Jesus in both the parables referred to earlier, not only led this “evil man” to believe that Christ is a “hard, and austere man, with high expectations”... but, sadly, believing his Lord to be so, he has treated his own Brothers and Sisters with this same “hard, austere,

unreasonable” spirit. See the context of 2 Sam 1:16, from where Jesus “borrows” the words, “Out of your own mouth you are condemned.”

These are the words of David to the young Amalekite who had just admitted to killing Saul, the Lord’s anointed. Jesus is telling us that the attitude of the “Sloth” toward his Brothers and Sisters is as “Toxic” as the Pharisees’ attitudes toward Jesus, and the young Amalekite’s attitude toward King Saul, the Lord’s Anointed.

Why a Sloth? Is it because the way of the “evil, legalistic mind” is always to take the easiest course?

Is it because the way of man is to be men pleasers, rather than “the Way” of Christ, as one who is pleasing to God?

Notice that Jesus refers to the Spiritual Sloth, as “a wicked servant”, someone who is “His enemy”, and an “unprofitable servant”. In Matthew 12, Jesus identifies His Spiritual Abusers as “evil and adulterous.” Jesus takes up these same themes again in Matthew 24:48-51, when He describes the “Evil Servant,” in the contrast to the “Good and Faithful Servant” highlighted in the previous few verses – i.e. Matthew 24:45-47.

Where the Good and Faithful Servant presides in love over a “House of Healing”, i.e. ‘a Hospital for sinners’, feeding his fellows with the open hand of Grace, just as he has seen the Father do, confident in the knowledge that the Kingdom is already here, the Evil servant (*still in the same “House” – but in his eyes it is a “Hotel for Perfect Saints” not a “Hospital for Sinners”*) makes fists out of what should be open hands of **grace**, has his own private fears about all sorts of things, becomes intoxicated with power, and uses abusive methodology to “get his own way.”

“To eat and to drink with the Drunken” is to become identified with those “religious systems” that use “excommunication/disfellowship,” not as a reluctant tool to reclaim the erring, but as an open message to others, to **warn those looking on**, not to make *this* “servant of God” angry and upset, lest they too become the objects of his obsessive attentions!

Here, in the final verses of Matthew 24, is a pessimistic, faithless, self serving, mean spirited, bad tempered wretch, who is not above using the gracious gifts that God has freely given to us all, (to share with all His creation), as weapons or methods of control and power over others.

Remember what the Lord said to this “Evil Servant” class a few verses on? ***“In that you have done, or not done, these things unto the least of these my little ones (Christ’s “children”), you have done, or not done, it unto me.”***

Surely the Golden Rule applies? Do unto others as you would be done by. And with what measure you use to check out how others measure up to **your** standards, that same measure is going to be used against your own selves.

Therefore, be **Gracious**, even as your Father in Heaven is **Gracious**. And imitate Him in every **gracious** way. For by sharing that **Grace**, we truly make His Kingdom to grow and His children to greatly increase in number.

Brethren Cliff York and Steve Cook.

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A FEW THOUGHTS ON PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Suggested Introductory reading: 1 Kings 8:22-55.

At a Mutual Improvement Class I recall a talk on prayer and if my memory serves me correctly it was given by our late brother Rupert Chamberlain. I don't remember any details of what was said that night but I well remember my own feelings and the feelings of others who expressed their thoughts afterwards. It was so well received by everyone and felt to be so helpful that it was decided there and then that we should have more talks on prayer.

I was a young man then and I was listening to one of the respected Elders of the ecclesia talking upon a subject very close to his heart. If there have been any further talks on prayer at this M I Class since then I have missed them and it has been my loss. I mention this because I believe it was partly due to my request to the Bible Class Program Committee that the subject of prayer should be included in this years program and when I agreed to give this talk, it was not because I felt I was the right person for the job but because I felt responsible for this subject being in the program.

Prayer is a subject of the heart and it is a big subject because it covers man's approach to God in so many different ways, for so many different reasons and on so many varied occasions. There is no way in which one could adequately deal with the subject in one evening.

The word 'pray' means 'to ask' or "please" and though not used any more in this sense in our modern language we are all familiar with this meaning in the scriptures; but prayer has come to mean much more than just asking and in the sense we shall use it here it is our approach to our Creator in our worship of Him, our reverence for Him, our thanking Him as well as our asking of Him.

So let's see some of the ways in which a few people in the Old Testament times approached God. Adam and Abraham and others talked directly with God or with an angel as God's representative but there were other occasions when it was necessary to approach God through the priest or High Priest who would intercede for them. Then there were the sacrifices, the casting of lots, Urim and Thummim, vows, oaths and fastings all of which involve prayer. In fact, no part of worship can be left out of our consideration of prayer.

There are very many prayers recorded in the Old Testament, and besides the Psalms I am told there are about 90 others, though tonight I shall touch upon very few. One of the most marvellous things about these prayers is that they are all expressed by man and women of great faith. They contain no errors, no false nor even doubtful or questionable ideas and in all these prayers we find nothing but truth. We find God-fearing men and women pouring out their hearts, expressing the very highest thoughts of which the human mind is capable. We see them reflecting the character of their great Creator, accepting His covenants, acknowledging His righteousness, proclaiming His love and mercy and grace, while, at the same time, realising their own unworthiness, understanding their obligations and, in humility, appreciating their great privileges. As a man thinketh, so is he and in considering prayer we are treading sacred ground where thoughts of the heart meet with God and it is a great honour to come so close as to share such intimacies, fears, hopes and joys.

The prayer that was read by way of introduction is the climax of the Old Testament. God had chosen the site on which the temple was to be built - the threshing floor of Ornan (1 Chronicles 21:18), "Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up and set up an alter unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." And in chapter 22 v. 1 "Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God and this is the alter of burnt-offering for Israel." Then in verse 19 David charges Solomon, his son "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God: arise therefore and build ye the sanctuary of the Lord God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the Lord." 1 Kings 8 is the prayer of dedication of that temple - the sanctuary of the Lord God. It is the supreme prayer of the Old Testament, even as the 17th chapter of John's Gospel is the supreme prayer of the New, and it is that on which the Law of Moses centres, and indeed the whole of the Old Testament.

It is a prayer which contains all the elements of worship - praise, thanksgiving, reverence and supplication, covenants and vows. What may seem remarkable is the submissiveness of Solomon; his dependence and humility before God, this is in great contrast to the kings of his time who were despots who ruled with great authority and severity and while Solomon was fast becoming the greatest king of the greatest nation in the world his heart showed a right understanding of his relationship with his Maker.

If we are to fully appreciate these prayers it is necessary that we too, have a right understanding of our relationship with God, for only then can we know the depths and the riches of His love, and this, in turn, greatly affects our own attitude in prayer as well as enriching our estimation of the prayers we are considering.

God, over the years, made several covenants with man and in each it is God who formulates the covenant and man has no part in this but to accept whatever God decrees. These covenants show His righteousness, love and mercy and man has to acknowledge his proper standing in the eyes of his Creator.

The first prayer we will look at is in Genesis 24. Abraham's eldest servant ruled over all his house and in an earlier chapter we are told that Abraham's chief steward was Eliezer. It would seem likely that they were one and the same, so let's call him Eliezer here. Now this servant was the eldest of many. We would call him a slave today for he was owned by Abraham and he accepted this as his position. His duty was to do his master's bidding. Eliezer was also a God-fearing man.

Well, Abraham was old and he sent Eliezer on a long journey - perhaps some 600 or 700 miles - to find a bride for his son Isaac. A journey lasting about 2 weeks or so. At the end of his journey, Eliezer seeks guidance in prayer, verse 12, "And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham." Notice how Eliezer asks for nothing on his own account, nor does he presume to address God as his God, but Abraham's. He makes himself of no account. Verse 14, "And let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and she shall say, Drink; and I will give thy camels drink, also, let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac, and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master."

Here we see Eliezer's attitude as an example to us all as a right attitude for all God's servants and is the one shown in all the Old Testament prayers. And how quickly God answered Eliezer's prayer! Before he had done speaking in his heart there was Rebekah before him! He stood in wonderment for a few moments while the realisation of the events that had happened came to him. When he had finished telling Rebekah his mission, and learning that there was room to lodge in, he again bowed his head in thanksgiving and worshipped God. Verse 27, "And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth; I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." That was enough for Eliezer, for he wished for nothing more than to complete his mission. But let's just complete the next part of this delightful story - not that I wish to say much more about it but just for its own sake. Rebekah goes into the house to tell her family this remarkable news while Eliezer remains waiting outside. But not for long and the next words he hears have a familiar ring to them - "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without? For I have prepared the house."

What a wonderful welcome! This surely was not the usual form of addressing a slave and we can only suppose that there was something about this man Eliezer which made it appropriate.

Next we will turn to Genesis 3. Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit. They knew they were naked and they hid from God. Now, prayer is our approach to God, but that's not what Adam and Eve wanted to do just now for they were fearful of Him and wanted nothing more than to get away from Him for they knew that their lives were in danger. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" and that's what they had done. It was necessary for God to show the initiative to bring them back to Him. So He called them until they realised it was no use hiding away any more. They had to finally approach Him and talk with Him. They were humble, full of remorse and ashamed. They wanted to put things right but there was no prayer they could offer that would do this, and then they were told that God would put things right for them - in His way and in His good time. The coverings they had made for themselves would not do and they watched while a lamb was slain and the skin made into aprons for each to wear. We don't know how

they felt in seeing the animal slain, but it is an unpleasant sight and to some a distressing experience, especially the first time. And to feel responsible for the slaying would only add to their sadness. But even more than just this, for they had to wear those skins day by day, always reminding them of their guilt; it had been all their fault. It was explained to them that one day God would provide a lamb which would take away all sin but until then, regular sacrifices had to be made.

Adam and Eve had no alternative but to accept a new relationship with their Creator, and God formulated a new covenant for them to live by. There was no going back to the way things were for the Cherubim, each with a flaming sword would have destroyed them, as indeed it does all that is not acceptable to God. We may be quite sure Adam and Eve offered up a prayer of thanksgiving that their lives were spared.

Adam and Eve were now sinners and had sold themselves and were slaves to sin. All future generations would be born into that slavery, and even as slaves have no rights so man has no rights, but he must serve a master. However, slaves can be bought and sold, and God so loved the world that he set about buying. It was not the will of God that man should be slaves to sin and death. So now the covering of skins gave provisional re-instatement of Divine favour, and in the 4,000 years from Adam to Christ sacrifices reminded the God-fearing of their position of helplessness and hopelessness apart from the love, mercy and grace of God, and like Eliezer, they sought to do only the will of Him who set them on life's journey.

Prayer is for our benefit. It is because of God's love for His children that He asks us to pray to Him, and indeed He seeks our prayers and puts us in situations which leave us no alternative. He knows our needs and He tries our hearts - time and again in order to build our trust in Him and develop our characters.

Now let's turn to Exodus 14. Israel, after leaving Egypt, was now three days journey into the wilderness. The Egyptian army came marching after them in order to recapture them and take them back again to slavery. The children of Israel had travelled down a valley to the sea shore. There were mountains on either side and they were in trouble. They had a big problem. Mountains to the right, mountains to the left, the enemy behind and the sea in front! What were they to do? They couldn't fight, for they had no weapons, and they couldn't flee, for there was no where to go. But their problem was their opportunity - their opportunity to show their trust in God, and they cried unto the Lord. Sadly, it was not a cry for help but a cry of complaint for they failed to show any faith in God and in verse 11, "They said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt with us, to carry us out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in this wilderness."

Moses, ever patient, pleads with them to put their trust in God. "The Lord will fight for you." But the lesson of appealing to God had yet to be learnt. Time and again the children of Israel failed to approach God in the right way and in the right frame of mind. Though they had been slaves in Egypt and had been severely treated and any complaint brought only harsher treatment and greater burdens, they would rather live for the moment in Egypt than put their trust in God. Where was their thankfulness and their appreciation of all that the Lord had done and was now doing for them? How many had hearts acceptable to God? Sadly, it seems very few.

For another contrast we will turn next to 11 Chronicles 20. "It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazon-tamar, which is Engedi. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said, O Lord God of our fathers, art thou not God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgement, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house), and cry

unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee. And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives and their children.”

How similar was their situation to that of Israel in the wilderness when they had mountains to the right, mountains to the left, the enemy behind and the sea in front! And here again, the people were in dire straights. And again, their problem was their opportunity to show faith. And this they did. Jehoshaphat feared and set himself to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast, and Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord. They put their hearts right with God. This is what it is all about. All things work for the good of those that love God. Jehoshaphat, in his prayer recalls Solomon’s prayer of dedication and they link themselves with the great purpose of God. They cried unto the Lord God in their affliction but this time to seek help. Verse 12, “for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee, and all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives and their children.” It was no use looking around to see what they could do for themselves. They had to look up, and in order to look up one has to stand still. Verse 15 “And he (Jahaziel, a Levite in the congregation) said, Hearken ye, all Judah and all ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God’s... verse 17. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you. O Judah and Jerusalem; fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go ye out against them, for the Lord will be with you.” Notice verse 18... “And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord and the Levites stood up to praise the Lord” and all this is before the battle had begun!

Next morning they rose early and went into the wilderness of Tekoa where their enemies were encamped, and Jehoshaphat stood encouraging the people saying “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper.”

Verse 21 is of great interest for we read, “And when he had consulted the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord and that they should praise the beauty of holiness as they went out before the army and say, Praise the Lord; for His mercy endureth for ever.” It was the singers who went out first - before the army! And all the people praised God, even though the enemy they were going out to meet were preparing for battle. What faith! What trust in God! Verse 22, “And as they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir ...and they were smitten ...and none escaped.” O what joy and thankfulness those people experienced that day. Their salvation was reward enough but on top of all this they had the spoil of their enemies which took them three days to collect, it was so much. And finally, they came back to Jerusalem. Verses 27 & 28 “Then they returned every man of Judah and Jerusalem and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them to go again to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord.” No doubt to offer thanksgiving in the house of God before returning to their homes.

We have looked at right and wrong attitudes of the heart before God, now let’s turn to the subject of casting of lots and the Urim and Thummim. This casting of lots was used very extensively in the Old Testament and provision was made for it in the Law of Moses. It was a very deliberate way of seeking a decision from God. It was used on the Day of Atonement for deciding which of the two goats should be slain and which set free. It was used in the allocation of territory when the children of Israel entered the Promised Land. It was used to determine guilty people, and it was used in the allocation of Temple duties. The Urim and the Thummim would also appear to be a method of casting of lots and used on occasions to determine guilty persons but also elsewhere used to seek council of the Lord.

In all cases it would appear to be the prerogative of the priests to cast lots. The first occurrence is in Leviticus 16:8. This is on the Day of Atonement and Aaron had to cast lots over the two goats “one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scape-goat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord’s lot fell

and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to make an atonement with him and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.”

It may seem a very simple matter but the choice of which goat should live and which should die was made by God and not by man, and there can be little doubt that before the lots were cast a prayer was offered to God, a prayer for guidance, of confession and of thankfulness, though no form of words is recorded.

Let's now turn to Joshua 7. Jericho had fallen to the Israelites. The first city to fall to them as they entered the Promised Land under Joshua. Ai was next, but something went wrong. They were defeated and Joshua was perplexed. Verse 6, “And Joshua rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.” Then to verse 10 “And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou upon thy face? Israel hath sinned and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them; for they have taken of the accursed thing and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and have put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies because they were accursed. Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.”

It may be noted that God could so easily have told Joshua that it was Achan who had stolen the clothing and the silver and the gold from Jericho and hidden it in his tent, but God, in His wisdom uses the casting of lots before all the people and this way all the people of Israel were involved. Indeed, God said that Israel had sinned - not just one man or one family. It was necessary for the people to consider themselves as one, so that whatever one person does affects others also. God declared that He would not stay in their midst if there were any amongst them who would not obey His commands. Verse 14 “In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes, and it shall be that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof. And the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households. And the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man.” And so it was. The lots were cast before the Lord and in due course Achan was taken and he and all that he had was destroyed. As prayer is man's approach to God and all the nation were in prayer at this time, anxious to know why they had been defeated at Ai, who had sinned and what had been done to offend God that He should forsake them. And God was all the while drawing the people closer to Him, so that He should be involved in all they did.

Urim and Thummim. When Joshua allocated the territory to each of the tribes of Israel this is recorded in Joshua chapter 18 that he “cast lots in Shiloh before the Lord.” We do not know just what form the casting of lots took and we get no further help in this direction from 1 Chronicles where we read of the allocation of the Temple duties. It seems possible that the Urim and Thummim were used for the casting of lots but there can be no certainty upon this for there is a considerable amount of conjecture surrounding the Urim and Thummim, so I feel a few minutes spent looking at this subject may be well spent here. Let's see first of all what we know for certain about the Urim and Thummim and for this we will turn to Exodus 28 where we find that they consisted of two plates carried in the Breast Plate of the high priest. Verse 30 “And thou shalt put in the breast plate of judgement the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be upon Aaron's heart when he goeth in before the Lord. And Aaron shall bear the judgement of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually.” So we see that these two plates, carried in the breast plate were in some way connected with the judgement of the people. In the margin of your bible you may see that the meaning of Urim and Thummim is ‘lights and perfections’ but this is by no means the only interpretation, for others are ‘doctrine and judgement,’ ‘declaration and truth’, etc., none of which make much difference to our understanding of the matter.

In Numbers 27 we see God directing Joshua and the high priest Eleazer in the use of the Urim and Thummim, although only the Urim is mentioned. Verse 18, “And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hands upon him, and set him before Eleazer the priest, and before all the congregation, and give him a charge in his sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazer the priest (verse 21) who shall ask counsel for him after the judgement of Urim before the Lord. At his word they shall go out, and at his word shall they come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.” As this was at the end of Moses life and the people were preparing to go into the Promised Land, it would seem that this going out and coming in would refer to battle. They had

the land to conquer and now provision was being made for Joshua to enquire of the Lord, through the priest, as to when he should lead the people out to battle and when he should bring them in again.

Later on we see King Saul used Urim and Thummim as we read in 1 Samuel 14:38 “And Saul said. Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people, and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day, for as the Lord liveth which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But there was not a man among all the people that answered him. Then said he unto Israel, Be ye on one side and I and Jonathan on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee.... verse 41 Therefore Saul said unto the Lord God of Israel, give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken. And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken.” In the Authorised Version of the bible there is no mention of Urim and Thummim, but the Revised Standard Version reads at verse 41, Therefore Saul said, O Lord God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt be in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord God of Israel, give Urim; But if this guilt is in thy people Israel, give Thummim, And Jonathan and Saul were taken... verse 42, then Saul said Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan, and Jonathan was taken.” It would seem from this that the use of Urim and Thummim was the usual form for casting of lots.

One more thing to mention here and it is that God sometimes did not answer, as in 1 Samuel 28. By this time Saul had lost his faith and had been rejected by God.

This is now close to the end of Saul’s life. The Philistines had gathered a particularly large army and Saul was afraid. Verse 5 “And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines he was afraid and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul enquired of the Lord the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.” So how could this casting of lots work if it could give a “no answer”? Well, the bible doesn’t tell us any more than we have considered so far, so now we must go outside of the scriptures to other sources to see if we can find out anything more, and here we learn that the priest, after making the appropriate request in prayer, would take out the two plates from his breast plate and throw them to the floor. If this is the case then the casting of lots was not unlike the tossing of a coin we would use today to see if it would show ‘heads’ or ‘tails’. However, there is one most important difference in that there were two plates thrown down, not one. Let’s suppose that each of these two plates had the word ‘Urim’ written on one side and the word ‘Thummim’ written on the other side, then, when thrown to the floor they could each show ‘Urim’, or they could each show ‘Thummim’ or they could show differently, the one showing ‘Urim’ and the other ‘Thummim’ and this last case could be considered ‘no answer’. With only one plate the people could receive an answer not in accord with God’s will, as may have been the case with the Apostles, for in the first chapter of Acts we find the eleven disciples deciding, possibly in their own wisdom, that either Barsabas or Matthias should replace Judas Iscariot in order to make up their number to twelve. And they prayed “Lord, which knoweth the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen...” and the lot fell on Matthias. But I wonder... did they give God the opportunity of saying neither Barsabas, nor Matthias, by giving a ‘no answer’? Personally I believe it was the Apostle Paul, the one “born out of due time,” as he says of himself, who replaced Judas Iscariot. But now I have strayed into the New Testament and that is not part of my subject.

Russell Gregory. (Jan. 1984)

Jesus said...

If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” John 7:37.

If a person is convinced that the Holy Spirit is not available to them to-day then they are not going to thirst after it. The loss is great, for it is the Holy Spirit that leads us into all Truth, for we are all taught of God. (Isaiah 54:13). It is not flesh and blood that reveals Jesus to us; who He is, or what He has

accomplished on our behalf. It is the God of heaven and earth, through His Spirit. “No man can come unto me,” said Jesus, “Except the Father... draw him.” John 6:44. And “no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:3.

“If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” John 4:10. And the water that Jesus Christ gives becomes a “well of water springing up into everlasting life.” Verse 14.

“If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Luke 11:11-13.

I wish to thank Brother Allon Maxwell for the following response to “Baptism In The Name of The Lord” which appeared on pages 17-23 of our last C.L.

Dear Russell, I read with interest the article “Baptism In The Name of The Lord”. Here is my response:

EUSEBIUS AND MATTHEW 28:19

In my opinion the article which appears under the title “BAPTISM IN THE NAME OF THE LORD” on pages 17-23 of the Nov/Dec 2009 Circular Letter, is greatly flawed in its treatment of the subject.

First, I think it is completely wrong to attempt to use any passage of Scripture, be it from either Matthew or Acts, to create any sort of “ecclesiastical liturgy” which must be said over the person being baptised, in order to make the baptism valid. Over the years, I have encountered many whose fanatical and dogmatic insistence on the use of specific words by the baptizer, ignored completely the heart’s attitude towards God, of those being baptised. I am absolutely certain that God is much more concerned with that than with the form of the “agency words” said over the person being baptised.

Second, the article, whilst saying (top page 20) that it “makes no judgement” against those who have been “baptised according to the Trinitarian formula”, then proceeds to quote 2 Chronicles 30:18-20 to suggest that they might be in need of forgiveness! The inclusion of Appendix G (page 22) can only serve to strengthen the impression that the author actually does think it is a “*deviation from a divinely-appointed symbol that arouses the displeasure of God*”.

This I suggest is an improper use of Scripture, which might easily place a stumbling block in the path of the simple and unwary, with serious consequences for the offender causes them to stumble. (Matthew 18:6).

God has allowed those words to appear in virtually all versions of the English Scriptures He has given us. God has not given us any clear and unequivocal evidence that they are invalid. Nor has he ever said anywhere that He is displeased with any who might actually use them for a “baptismal formula”. To suggest, or even vaguely hint, that He might actually condemn anyone who does that, is to charge Him with gross injustice. That is a serious matter. Those who truly know Him know that He isn’t like that at all.

If having the wrong “agency words” said over you really does require rebaptism, then it becomes a salvation issue. And if it was a matter affecting salvation, it would be clearly and unmistakably spelled out in Scripture. It is not! And therefore it cannot be either a sin, or a salvation issue.

SHOULD I BE REBAPTISED?

I include this section for the sake of any who might be caused by the article in the Circular Letter, to lose their peace about the validity of their baptism.

In the Christadelphian Ecclesia where I was baptised, it was an established tradition to repeat the words of Mathew 28:19 before the immersion, and although I don't remember that bit, the brother who pushed me under the water almost certainly said them over me. Over the years since I left the Christadelphians, several have raised this issue with me and tried to pressure me to be rebaptised with the "right words" said over me. Yes! It has happened! And "pressure" is the right word!

I have always prayerfully declined. My original baptismal covenant was with God - not with men - not with any denomination. I was baptised at the age of 15. (3 March 1948) I knew what I was doing. It was the answer of my personal "*good conscience towards God*". (1 Peter 3:21). I believed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. I was convicted of my sins. I wanted to repent and be forgiven. I wanted to learn to live without sin. I wanted to serve God in this life and be ready to inherit a place in the Kingdom of God when it is established at the return of Jesus from Heaven. I can remember still the prayer I said to Him as I came up out of the water. And I remember still, with great joy, the peace that came into my heart at that moment!

I was making a covenant with God. And although I haven't always managed to keep that covenant as well as I should have, I have never changed my mind about making it. The really wonderful thing is that God has always honoured His side of the Covenant, even when I failed! He has always been "there" to teach me, guide me, correct me when I got it wrong, and even to chasten me when I needed it! (Hebrews 12:5-13).

For me to be baptised again would amount to a repudiation of that covenant! It would be saying that there wasn't a real covenant with God. It would be ignoring the fact that God has always kept His side of the bargain! And that would be very dishonouring to God! So of course I have always rejected any suggestion that I didn't get it right the first time - simply because the wrong words might have been said by the brother who pushed me under the water.

That doesn't mean I haven't changed my mind about some of the things which I used to believe the Bible said! There were certainly many things I didn't understand fully then. There have been other things where I found the Christadelphians were just plain wrong! But none of those things affect in any way, my basic covenant with God to repent from my sins and live for him as a reborn Child of God.

Of course there are some fundamental things without which you cannot even begin to have the faith to believe before you repent and are baptised. But that is completely different issue to this present discussion.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE MANUSCRIPTS

The traditional wording of Matthew 28:19 appears in virtually every known Greek manuscript! There are no grounds at all for claiming that the passage is not authentic. The arguments which suggest otherwise depend on mere speculation that earlier Manuscripts might have existed which do not have it!

Is the brief mention of Codex Vaticanus in Appendix C, point 8, supposed to imply that, because it might have been copied from a manuscript made by Eusebius, it does not have the disputed passage? If so it is misleading. The truth is that Vaticanus does contain the passage under discussion in exactly the same form as other Greek manuscripts, from which we have our English translations.

"IN THE NAME OF" MEANS "AGENCY".

To use the phrase "*in the name of*" is to claim authority to act on behalf of the person whose name we use. A baptizer is acting as an agent for Jesus. Jesus is using the agent's hands to perform the baptism. And of course to act as an agent for Jesus is to also act as an agent for the Father in whose name Jesus came, and in whose name Jesus authorised the ritual of Baptism as the means of entry into our covenant relationship with God. Thus there is no practical difference between the two phrases "*in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit*" and "*in the name of Jesus*". They effectively mean the same thing. Indeed, so long as this "agency" concept properly understood by the parties concerned, I see no real need to insist on saying any specific form of "agency words" at all, to make the action valid!

(Of course it should go without saying that the first of those two alternatives has no Trinitarian implications! There is plenty of other Scripture to refute such claims.)

WHAT DID EUSEBIUS REALLY SAY?

Not the least of the problems is the attempt in Appendices B & C to use Eusebius as the main authority for rejecting the authenticity of the “baptismal formula” in Matthew 28:19.

Eusebius is not consistent in his alleged quotation of this passage. It is certainly true that in most of the several places where he refers to it, he does not use the phrase “*in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*” Instead, sometimes he uses the phrase “*Go and make disciples of all nations in my name*”, but sometimes he simply says “*Go and make disciples of all nations*” and does not include anything about a name at all. Having examined for myself several of the places in his writings where he uses it, I suspect that he is not actually quoting verbatim from a Greek Gospel manuscript, but selectively paraphrasing a portion of the verse to make his point.

However the really important point is that in at least one place, Eusebius does quote from Matthew 28:19, exactly as it appears in our English Bibles - “*as also our Lord, sending forth his disciples for the preaching, said, Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*” Eusebius - Letter to the People of His Diocese 3 [A.D. 323]).

If you want to read it for yourself, it can be found online at -
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.ix.ii.html>

And of course that means that Eusebius cannot be used as an authority to reject the traditional words of the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19. He actually testifies to their authenticity by quoting them!

OTHER EARLY WRITERS

There are a number of early writers some of whom predate Eusebius by many years, who also quote from Matthew 28:19 in the same exact words found in every known existing Greek manuscript, and the vast majority of our English Translations!

These include:

Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) **1st Apology Chapter LXI. Christian baptism.**

Irenaeus (c. 130–200) *Against Heresies* Book 3 Chapter XVII:1

Tertullian, (c. 200 AD) *On Baptism*, Chapter XIII: and again in “*Against Praxeas*”, chapter 2

Hippolytus (170-236 AD) in *Fragments: Part II.-Dogmatical and Historical.--Against the Heresy of One Noetus*,

Cyprian (200-258AD) in *The Seventh Council of Carthage Under Cyprian*

Gregory Thaumaturgus (205-265 AD) in *A Sectional Confession of Faith*, XIII

Victorinus (ca. 270-303) *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John*; First chapter

Tatian the Syrian (A.D. 170) *The Diatesseron* Section LV

The Didache (c.50-120) *ch. 7*

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented for the rejection of the “baptismal formula” in Matthew 28:19 is very unconvincing. The combined weight of all the known Greek manuscripts, together with quotations from early writers, (including Eusebius) all support its validity.

It is scripturally incorrect to suggest that the mere form of “agency words” said over a baptismal candidate might invalidate his baptism.

God looks at the heart! (1 Samuel 16:7).

In Christ, Allon Maxwell.

Editor's Note and Comments: In our last C.L. I attributed the article "Baptism In The Name of The Lord" to Brother A.H.Broughton. However, all it stated on the leaflet (which was sent to me about one week before it was included in the last C.L.) was that it was available from A.H.Broughton and not necessarily written by him as I had taken for granted. It was certainly a very old leaflet which was sent to me by someone now in their nineties and had been lying in a draw for many years. We have another article dated 1962 by A Ploughman which seems to be an updated and more detailed version of the same article.

Having said that we wish to thank Brother Allon Maxwell for some good points and we are pleased he has shared the benefits of his researches with us. It seems unlikely that the original writer/compiler of the article would have the same wide access to the relevant manuscripts as we have today via the Internet. However, in defence of the author of the article I would quote from the 1962 extended version the following:

"According to Conybeare: "Eusebius cites this text (Matthew 28:19) again and again in works written between 300 and 336, namely in his long commentaries on the Psalms, on Isaiah, his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, his *Theophany*... in his famous history of the Church, and in his panegyric of the emperor Constantine. I have, after a moderate search in these words of Eusebius, found eighteen citations of Matthew 28:19, and always in the following form:

'Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I commanded you.'

I have collected all these passages except one which is in a catena published by Mat in a German Magazine, the *Zeitschrift fur die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, edited by Dr Erwin Preuschen in Darmstadt in 1901. And Eusebius is not content merely to cite the verse in this form, but he more than once comments on it in such a way as to show how much he set store by the words 'in my name.' Thus, in his *Demonstratio Evangelica* he writes thus (col- 240, p. 136):

'For He did not enjoin them "to make disciples of all the nations" simply and without qualification, but with the essential addition "in His name." For so great was the virtue attaching to His appellation that the Apostle says, God bestowed on him the name above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow of things in heaven and on earth and under the earth. It was right therefore that He should emphasise the virtue of the power residing in His name but hidden from the many, and therefore say to His Apostles, "Go ye, and make disciples of all the nations in my name."

Conybeare proceeds (in *Hibbert Journal*, 1902):' "It is evident that this was the text found by Eusebius in the very ancient codices collected fifty to a hundred and fifty years before his birth by his great predecessors. Of any other form of text he had never heard and knew nothing until he had visited Constantinople and attended the Council of Nice. Then in two controversial works written in his extreme old age, and entitled, the one, "Against Marcellus of Ancyra," the other "About the Theology of the Church," he used the common reading. One other writing of his also contains it, namely a letter written after the Council of Nice was over, to his see of Caesarea."

In his *Textual Criticism Of The New Testament* Conybeare writes: "It is clear, therefore, that of the MSS. which Eusebius inherited from his predecessor, Pamphilus, at Caesarea in Palestine, some at least preserved the original reading, in which there was no mention either of Baptism or of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It had been conjectured by Dr Davidson, Dr Martineau, by the Dean of Westminster, and by Prof. Harnack (to mention but a few names out of many) that here the received text could not contain the very words of Jesus - this long before anyone except Dr Burgon, who kept the discovery to himself, had noticed the Eusebian form of reading."

An objection was raised by Dr Chase, Bishop of Ely, "who argues that Eusebius found the *Textus Receptus* (traditional text) in his manuscripts, but substituted the shorter formula in his works for fear of vulgarising and divulging the sacred Trinitarian formula. It is interesting to find a modern Bishop reviving the very argument used 150 years before, in support of the forged

text of 1 John 5 - "Bengal... allowed that the words (the Three Witnesses) were in no genuine MS... Surely, then, the verse is spurious! No: this learned man finds a way of escape - the passage was of so sublime and mysterious a nature that the secret discipline of the Church withdrew it from the public books, till it was gradually lost! Under what a want of evidence must a critic labour who resorts to such an argument!" - Person (Preface to his Letters).

Conybeare continues, refuting the argument of the Bishop of Ely: "It is sufficient answer to point out that Eusebius's argument, when he cites the text, involves the text 'in my name.' For, he asks, 'in whose name?' and answers that it was the name spoken of by Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians 2:10."

The Ency. Ret. and Ethics states: "The facts are, in summary, that Eusebius quotes Matthew 28:19 twenty-one times, either omitting everything between 'nations' and 'teaching,' or in the form 'make disciples of all nations in my name,' the latter form being the more frequent."

But when all is said, the main point which Brother Allon ably brought out is that no 'special wording' should be used as if it made the baptism valid. Any such dogmatism on the part of the one baptising another is contrary to the spirit of God. Indeed it is of little importance what that persons beliefs are though of course some common understanding between the two is greatly desirable.

This brings us to another point, not covered in these articles but the question arises from time to time - Is it necessary for someone to assist in one's baptism or can a person baptise themselves? We have always assured enquirers that they can. We have found no scripture whatever to the contrary and if a person is convinced of the need to be baptised and there is no one they feel they wish to ask for assistance then we would urge them to baptise themselves. Several in our Fellowship have done this knowing that their baptism is submitting to an agreement between Jesus and themselves, bringing them into covenant relationship with God through Jesus sacrifice..

I wonder if anyone would like to comment further on this?

Again, there have been times when we have known that the baptismal words used from Matthew 28:19 have been misquoted, and when baptising another, instead of saying "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" they have said, "I now baptise you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This clearly is a mistake and we would ask anyone who baptises another to note the difference. In the first instance one is acting on behalf of Jesus as His agent but in the second he is making a statement that has no real meaning. For when we are baptised, we are baptised into the death of Jesus but we cannot be baptised into the death of God or the death of the Holy Spirit. Neither God nor the Holy Spirit died for us. Such a declaration should not be used.

Surely it is much better to say "I baptise you in the name of Jesus" for there is nowhere in scripture were we find the Apostles "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Russell.

Are we too involved with Christadelphians? They once had the truth, why not remind them?

Although the sincerity and the intellectual ability of the leaders of the Christadelphians may not be questioned, their written statements can, principally because they insist on repeating doctrines they believe they have adduced from the Scriptures, but in fact, have their origins in the teachings of the Mother Church.

From time to time their early leader writers stated the plain Scriptural truths concerning the nature of man, his relationship to God, and the nature of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even today there appears the occasional statement consistent with some of the early leaders, but by and large, the truth of their early understanding has withered and died. The fact that some of their doctrines stem from the apostate church reveal an obduracy akin to blindness, particularly the concept of flesh being cursed by an abstract noun. Many expositors have attempted to explain why the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross, and with many words they laid on their brethren and sisters “burdens hard to bear.” But it is to be noted that both Dr Thomas and Robert Roberts scripturally identified man’s nature and his relationship to God. And others too, have from time to time arrived at the same understanding but have been unable to retain its purity and beauty and have let it slip.

When seeking to learn many have been able to express some of the best scriptural definitions to be found anywhere; for example:

Dr Thomas wrote:

“A gracious, merciful and loving heavenly Father who first purchased us from the law of sin and death at the expense of His beloved Son, and put us on probation for immortality.”

And again he wrote:

“Redemption means to buy back, hence it is a release for a ransom: all who become God’s servants are therefore released from a former lord by purchase, the Purchaser is God, and the price or ransom is the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Robert Roberts wrote:

“The phrase sin-in-the-flesh is metonymical, it is not the expression of a literal element or principle found in physical organisation, literally sin is disobedience, or an act of rebellion. The impulses (temptation) that lead to this reside in the flesh and are therefore come to be called by the name of the act to which they give birth; the impulses which lead to sin existed before transgression as much as they did afterwards; there is no such thing as essential evil or sin. Some imagine there was a change in the nature of Adam when he transgressed, there is no evidence of this whatsoever, and the presumption and evidence are entirely the contrary way. There was a change in Adam’s relation to his Maker, but not in the nature of his organisation.”

Dr Thomas wrote:

“..the sins committed by others and borne in his own body on the Cross, as testified by 1 Peter 2:24.”

Again, he wrote:

“Death and corruption then, with reproduction, is a fundamental Law of the physical system of the six days. From these premises it will be seen that we dissent from our correspondent’s notion that all creation became corrupt, by which we understand him to mean ‘constitutionally impregnated with corruptibility at the fall.’ We believe that the change was moral not physical.”

And again:

“Now the blood of Jesus Christ was more precious than the life blood of any other man. If it had not been so, it would have been inadequate to the purchase for the world . . . The blood of Jesus was the only blood of all the generations of Adam, that had not been generated by the lust of the flesh; Jesus was an unblemished man, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing? for He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”

J. J. Hadley wrote:

“As regards His moral relation to the Father, He was under no curse whatsoever. He was not in the position of guilty man, who is outside Eden, and can approach the Father only with a petition for forgiveness. His relation to the Father was not that of one alienated from Him as was Adam and all his descendants. He was from the beginning. Holy, a beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased.”

H. Fry wrote:

“Make His death a penalty due to Himself personally, and you destroy both aspects of His loving obedience, for there is no virtue whatever in submitting to a penalty legally due to oneself.”

The Editor of the Christadelphian, 1965 wrote:

“Human nature is not sin, human nature is not the devil, it was not human nature that was condemned but sin, sin is lawlessness.”

Many others have written in similar vein, consistent with the clear statements in the Scriptures, but it is almost inconceivable that the following contrary statements should abound:

“Human flesh is wholly evil.”

“The devil, human nature, sin-in-the-flesh, we know to be synonymous terms.”

“Jesus condemned the human nature He received from His mother.”

“Human flesh is a body of sin, diabolos was located in the body of Jesus.”

“His death was undoubtedly for Himself as a physical cleansing of destroying the devil or sin in His own flesh.”

“He was as unclean as those He came to save.”

“The implantation of a physical law of decay, which works out dissolution and death.”

“It pleased God to require the ceremonial condemnation of this sin nature in crucifixion in the person of a righteous possessor of it.”

“Christ had to repudiate and destroy His human body because it was the nature of fallen man.”

“Jesus did not bear the penalty of sin. He merely suffered death.”

“There hung the devil dead.”

“Sinful flesh is flesh full of sin.”

“Jesus possessed a nature under condemnation to death so there was no violation of justice in His death, it was not wrong for Him to die, the death of Jesus was just.”

“How could Jesus die for sin if there was no sin there?”

“Sin ran in every drop of His blood.”

“He died because He bore our sinful nature.”

We are left wondering why such doctrines are apparently accepted by many Christadelphians who surely have nothing to fear from the truth.

Why do we press for openness and discussion? Because we see they once taught and occasionally still teach the stated Scriptural truths, plainly and simply. Herein is the tragedy we would seek to remedy, and it is a matter of regret that so many facets of the redemption of man, brought about by the loving kindness of our heavenly Father and the greatest love a man may have, i.e. sacrificial love, are diminished by their philosophy.

All the facts are clearly stated in scripture, beginning in Genesis in the Garden of Eden with the law stated, the consequences pronounced, guilt because of disobedience, the necessity of the shedding of blood to provide an acceptable covering for sin to prevent the sentence being carried out, and in God’s mercy, a new relationship between man and his Creator, with promises. Later, the Law of Moses was brought in to enable those reconciled by sacrifices to reciprocate and show their appreciation of His love in the keeping of His laws which He said were “for their good.”

All these and more are manifested in the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world, making an end of sacrifices and revealing a loving heavenly Father, abundant in mercy.

As a guide to our appreciation we would quote these well known passages:

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). “But was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews

4:15). “The life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls” (Leviticus 17:11). “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14). “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just... and killed the Prince of life” Acts 3:14,15). “The prince of this world (the devil)... hath nothing in me” (John 14:30). “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). “For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things.... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). “Greater love have no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again” (John 10:17). “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself, I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again, this commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:18). “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep” (John 10:11). “Who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6). “In whom we have redemption through his blood” (Ephesians 1:7). “He was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin” (1 John 3:5). Also Isaiah 53 and many more.

The principles of sacrifice for sin required by God are clear, well defined and established throughout the Law; for example: “Your lamb shall be without blemish a male of the first year” (Exodus 12:5), “Ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish.... whatsoever hath a blemish shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you” (Leviticus 22:19,20, “And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?” (Malachi 1:8, and “And if there be any blemish there in., thou shall not sacrifice it unto the Lord” (Deuteronomy 15:21).

The reason for God’s severity in establishing the quality of the sacrifices to be offered is perceived when we realise that all those offerings typified the work, character, the person and the life of Jesus Christ, the One in whom there was no sin; who was holy, harmless , undefiled, separate from sinners, and altogether lovely.

This is why we cannot leave Christadelphians alone; we are close to many of them, so let us be a help to those who have to leave them.

Name withheld by request.