

A Reply to “Sin and its Removal”

THE Editor of the *Sanctuary Keeper* has just issued a little pamphlet in which he endeavours to demonstrate that his teaching regarding sin is identical with that of Dr. Thomas.

The work is liable to give an erroneous impression for two reasons. In the first place, it takes great pains to establish certain propositions which the *Christadelphian* does not deny; and in the second place, by giving partial quotations, it makes the Doctor appear to sanction views which were entirely remote from his mind.

I will, as briefly as possible, take up the various points at issue, and show that the main points of Christadelphian teaching which constitute our basis of fellowship have remained absolutely unaltered.

The Editor of the *Sanctuary Keeper* gives a number of quotations from *Elpis Israel* regarding sin. He deduces as the result four propositions, which are susceptible of more than one meaning. Three features are involved in the issue:—1. What is meant by constituted sinner? 2. What is sin in the flesh? 3. Is there any legal guilt attaching to Adamic condemnation which can be removed apart from physical change, as in the case of infants at circumcision?

When these points have been settled the issue will be decided. I will give some quotations from the Doctor’s works, and also from back numbers of the *Christadelphian*.

First, with regard to the application of the word “sinner” to infants, Dr. Thomas gives it as a synonym for unclean (*Elpis Israel*, page 116). He says: “They will not be condemned to the second death because they were born sinners, nor to any other pains or penalties than those which are the common lot of humanity in the present life. They are simply under that provision of the constitution of sin which says “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”” (p. 117).

“Infants die because they are born of mortal flesh, and not because they have committed sin or are responsible for Adam’s sin.” (*Clerical Theology*, page 10.) Brother Andrew in the 1876 *Christadelphian*, page 64, wrote:—“To say that human beings who have committed no transgression die not through Adamic condemnation, but because of a natural law of mortality, is to introduce between two truths an antagonism which does not exist. True death occurs through such a law; but what is its origin? The decree by which the Almighty has condemned to death the Adamic race.”

Finally I will give a few quotations from the editor of the *Christadelphian*, taken from the volumes of 1874–5. To E. Turney:—“Finally, I do not teach that Christ

was a sinner either by birth or other means; this is your misrepresentation. I believe he inherited in his flesh the result of Adam's sin, not that he was a sinner himself." "And here I may add, for the sake of a few who are wondering what the phrase 'constitutional sinner' means, as once or twice employed by Dr. Thomas in reference to Christ; it means that he stood related to a sin-constitution of things—a state of things arising out of sin without being himself a committer of sin. . . . Only perversity would suppress the word constitutional, and allege that the Christadelphians teach Christ to have been a sinner." (*Christadelphian*, 1874, page 281.) "He (Jesus) was a sufferer from the effects of sin in all the items of weakness, labour, pain, sorrow, death; and in this sense (as a partaker with us of the effects of sin) has been described as a constitutional sinner, or one subject to a sin-constitution of things. But as this phrase gives occasion to disingenuous cavil, it is well to discard the phrase and look at the meaning which has been stated." (1875, page 375.) It is solely for this reason—because some have associated the idea of God's wrath with the phrase constitutional sinner that the term has been objected to, and these quotations show that the present attitude of the Christadelphian is exactly the same as it has always been.

The next point is the meaning of sin in the flesh. The following quotations will show what has always been intended by the phrase.

"The nature of the lower animals is as full of this physical evil principle as the nature of man; though it cannot be styled sin with the same expressiveness, because it does not possess them as the result of their own transgression. The name, however, does not alter the nature of the thing. (*Elpis Israel*, page 114).

The very clear explanation of the term in *Clerical Theology Unscriptural* has been quoted before. The editor of the *Sanctuary Keeper* says that the succeeding sentences throw a different light upon the portion which was quoted; but if he thinks so, he must misunderstand our position. There is nothing in the extended passage which he quotes to which I can take the slightest exception.

Sin in the flesh was defined thus by brother Andrew in the 1874 *Christadelphian*, page 122: "This knowledge in the sense of experience came into his (Adam's) flesh as the result of sin, and became afterwards a cause of sin in the flesh of his descendants, and on this account it is spoken of as sin in the flesh."

If brother Andrew will not accept this definition now, then he has completely changed; if he will accept it, then I for one am not at issue with him with regard to this particular point.

We now come to the third point. Did Dr. Thomas or other brethren teach that the Adamic condemnation involved legal or federal guilt? or is there a moral aspect to the condemnation which could be removed in the case of infants by a ceremony designed for that object?

The following words are from *Elpis Israel* page 115, *immediately following* a quotation given in the pamphlet under review: "There is much foolishness spoken and written about 'original sin.' Infants are made the subjects of a religious ceremony, to regenerate them because of original sin. . . . If original sin, which is in fact sin in the flesh, were neutralized, then all baptismally regenerated babes ought to live for ever, as Adam would had he eaten of the tree of life after he had sinned. But they die, which is a proof that the regeneration does not cure their souls, and is therefore mere theological quackery."

This is conclusive on the point at issue. If the condemnation were individual, involving legal guilt, then the idea of a religious ceremony to remove it from infants, such as brother Andrew teaches, would be eminently reasonable. But the Doctor ridicules the idea, and thereby shows that he regarded the Adamic condemnation purely as a vacial, federal matter, not as a condemnation which required to be individually postponed or warded off in the case of infants.

We now come to the question of sacrifice. In his efforts to show that the *Christadelphian* has changed its teaching regarding the sacrifice of Christ, brother Andrew actually quotes a passage from the December number of 1894, which is itself a quotation from 1873!! It is just an instance of how completely a man may be blinded by his advocacy of a particular theory.

A greater shock still, however, awaits us on the last page of the little pamphlet. The author says: "It is quite true that brother Roberts, during the Renunciation controversy, admitted that, as far as Christ was concerned, the shedding of his blood was not necessary, except as an act of obedience; but I pointed out to him at the time that in making this admission he was 'surrendering a citadel to the enemy.'"

Here is an admission! Brother Andrew knew perfectly well that brother Roberts took such a position at the time of the Renunciation controversy; he actually wrote a letter about the matter; and yet with this knowledge he has been sending about the country pamphlets which declare that *if* brother Roberts *had* taken such a position, the Renunciation controversy would have ceased! ("The Advocate on Adamic Condemnation," page 6, and the "Retrospect," page 4.)

These words, in fact, constitute a surrender of the whole contention that the *Christadelphian* has changed. It is no longer brother Roberts of to-day versus brother Roberts of twenty years ago, but brother Roberts of twenty years ago versus Dr. Thomas. The little pamphlet under review ends by saying that so long as the Editor of the *Christadelphian* "teaches that our position by birth does not require a justification by blood shedding, he is making a false claim," in maintaining that he is in harmony with Dr. Thomas. This is hardly a fair statement of the case.

Dr. Thomas, so far as I am aware, never viewed the case of Christ apart from his mission. It was on the supposition that Christ was the only one to be saved that the difficulty arose; and it would be difficult to say precisely what answer the Doctor would have given to such a question. He would probably have replied: "The question is—If the purpose of God had been entirely different in one particular, would it have been the same in all others? God would have done 'all His pleasure.' What He requires is necessary, nothing else." This is, indeed, the conclusion to which we are forced. Why was it necessary for sin to be condemned in sinful flesh innocent of transgression? If brother Andrew takes the same view as Dr. Thomas, as he claims, he will reply, "No other reason can be given than that God willed it" (see *Elpis Israel*, page 149). If we ask why it was that the Holiest of all could not be entered without a perfect sacrifice, the same answer must be given. If then we ask whether God would have required a declaration of his righteousness if Christ had been the only one to enter life, we ask a presumptuous question. If God's purpose had been different His will might have been different. As it was, He required Jesus to submit to a sacrificial death, consequently a violent death was necessary for his own redemption.

To say that this involves the idea of substitution is the very height of absurdity. From the standpoint of the new theory, Jesus was in a state of at-one-ment with God until he came under the curse of the law. Why then did he have to suffer prior to that? Why was he scourged? Why was he hanged on the tree since the at-one-ment was not destroyed until he was actually there? Was it not that "it became him by whom are all things to make the captain of our salvation perfect through suffering?" and was not Jesus' submission to death an act of obedience? (Phil. 2:8).

Substitution is not involved by the position brother Roberts took against the Renunciationists, but brother Andrew is running dangerously near it now when he speaks of the violent death "incurred by Adam and inflicted on Christ." In the 1875 *Christadelphian* the editor deals with the question of substitution. He says, page 90, "The orthodox notion of substitution, which is revived in Renunciationism, implies the exemption of those substituted from the operation to which the substitute is subjected." Is not the new theory gravitating in this direction to the obscuration of the fact that we have to pass through much tribulation, and that we are still unredeemed?

At all events the cry that the *Christadelphian* has changed has been surrendered. It is said the *Christadelphian* changed in denying that the descendants of Adam are legally guilty of his sin. If we turn to the 1876 *Christadelphian*, page 62, we find brother Andrew denying that the expression "sinners" as applied to Adam's descendants implies guilt. There is no legal saving clause; in fact, the statement is made as *an accessory* to the denial that they are regarded as actual transgressors of the Eden law.

The denial that God's wrath is upon all because of Adamic sin has also been regarded as a change; but if we turn to the *Christadelphian* for 1873, page 554, we find words infinitely stronger than any that have been employed in the present controversy. "The wrath of God," says brother Roberts, "is not revealed against us because Adam sinned (as the apostasy and Renunciationism teach), but because we ourselves transgress."

The idea that we are not individually condemned is given in the retrospect as a part of the change; but if we turn to the *Christadelphian* for 1874, page 526, the same idea is expressed in the same words: "No one is born under condemnation in its individual application; that is, no one is condemned as an individual until his actions as an individual call for it.

The refusal to apply the word sinner to infants has also been quoted, but we find that in 1874 brother Roberts made an exactly similar refusal, and for the same reason, *i.e.*, the wrath of God associated with the idea.

It has been claimed that the denial of a present freedom from the law of sin and death is a change. If we turn to the 1874 *Christadelphian*, page 304, brother Andrew, in antagonising the Renunciationists, destroys the very idea which he now enunciates. He says: "The passage which is supposed to support the extraordinary idea that believers die under the law of the spirit of life is Rom. 8:2. The apostle says, 'The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' A little attention to the context and the actual facts of the case will show that this statement is made *prospectively*. Later on, in the same page, he says, that the '*only change*' which a believer undergoes at baptism is 'one of relationship.'"

Lastly, we have in the little pamphlet under review the statement that "Christ's death was purely a matter of choice," placed as a change from previous teaching. We turn to the *Christadelphian* for 1874, and find on page 25 these words by brother Andrew himself: "No doubt the life which Jesus laid down was a '*voluntary surrender*.' He laid it down when it was only half expired."

I might quote much more, but it is not necessary. These extracts are sufficient to show that there has been a great deal of misrepresentation, and that the change is really on the side of those who deny the responsibility of the unjustified.

As there has been a certain amount of misunderstanding consequent upon the application of answers to specific questions to general definitions of faith, I will set forth a few propositions exhibiting the actual teaching of those who reject the new theory.

1. The Adamic condemnation is purely a racial, federal matter, which does not imply guilt in Adam's descendants.

2. While men are in Adam, they are under the constitution of sin. When they are baptised into Christ, they have forgiveness of their sins, and come under the constitution of righteousness, in other words they remain mortal, but ordered to be immortal with an "if."

3. The change which takes place at baptism is purely one of relationship, and the freedom from the law of sin and death is prospective so far as actual results are concerned.

4. Christ required redemption from Adamic nature equally with his brethren, and the mode of redemption which God had ordained was a perfect obedience culminating in a sacrificial death.

5. Sin in the flesh is the evil animal principle which evolves transgression as well as natural corruption. It exists in the lower animals as much as in man, but cannot be called sin with the same expressiveness, since in their case it is not the result of transgression.

These points which have been raised are really mere diversions from the main issue. The actual question is the ground of resurrectional responsibility. It is contended that "all in Christ" will be raised and no others. Yet Jesus commanded his disciples to preach in all the world (Mark 16.), and said that those who rejected their teaching should be damned. If this refers only to the Jewish world, how could rejecting Jews be "in Christ," since the sacrifices of the old dispensation were done away and could do them no good, while to baptism, instituted as the only means of justification, they would not submit? The Pharisees and the Saducees will be raised; were they in Christ? It is admitted that it is impossible to be in Christ apart from an acceptance of the one faith, and association with the sacrifice of Christ; and they refused both. The truth is simple when delivered from the refinements of legal metaphysics. "This is (the ground of) condemnation, that light is come." The man that knowingly rejects the words of Christ will be raised to condemnation (on Christ's own authority.)

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The Christadelphian, 1895, page 259-262