

Forgiveness and Mercy

or

Punishment and Penalty

I enclose a comparatively recent public paper, written by Bro. A. D. Strickler, and addressed "to whom it may concern." It is no better than his other public pamphlets and letters which have preceded it, and contains the same doctrinal errors as his "Out of Darkness into Light." The only reason for sending it forth at the present time is that many believers have been somewhat confused as to what Bro. Strickler actually does believe. This confusion is due to a paper drawn up by brethren Hill and Waite as their own idea as to what Bro. Strickler was teaching, a paper which was not prepared in any way by Bro. Strickler, although he did endorse it as expressing what he desired to teach.

It should be noted, however, that Bro. E. Hill in his pamphlet "I Plead," written Oct. 5, 1921, had said as follows, "I have at different times recently received several pamphlets of which I may specially mention: 'The Sacrifice of Christ,' H. G. Ladson; 'Consecrated Problems,' G. A. Witworth; 'Sacrifice,' J. W. Rostron; 'Out of Darkness,' A. D. Strickler.

Commenting on these pamphlets, Bro. Hill writes, "All these reasoners are very anxious we should not think they are teaching the doctrine of substitution; but that is inevitable; it is not only a substitutional doctrine; the theory and reasoning is inaccurate."

Because Bro. Hill appeared in the Hill-Waite statement to have reversed his opinion (without giving the brotherhood any inkling as to the reason for the change) many brethren concluded that he must have been able to convince Bro. Strickler that his former views as expressed in "Out of Darkness" were wrong, and that he had succeeded in persuading Bro. Strickler to abandon them, and so there was manifest in many quarters, a disinclination to take any further action against Bro. Strickler.

It should be noted, however, that the Hill-Waite statement, published in the Christadelphian in October, 1923 issue, was written by them without consultation with Bro. Strickler, and appears on the surface to be different from anything written by Bro. Strickler himself in his pamphlet. It should also be noted that the enclosed paper was written by Bro. Strickler himself a few months after he had signed and endorsed the Hill-Waite statement, without consultation with brethren Hill and Waite. It is, therefore, a fair and reasonable assumption that if there is any difference between the Hill-Waite statement, and the enclosed paper, that this, Bro. Strickler's own work, written in his own words, with the express purpose of putting before us his own ideas on the questions at issue between us—it is reasonable, I say, to conclude that Bro. Strickler believes and teaches the doctrines which he gives expression to in this his latest public utterance, regardless of what others may have persuaded him to put his signature to.

And brethren who will take the trouble to read this enclosed article of Bro. Strickler's, will not have any further doubt or uncertainty as to what he does believe and teach.

In this paper, Bro. Strickler answers three questions, and in his answers he frankly and clearly admits without any equivocation, that he believes the following:—

1. That God exacted from Jesus the punishment due to us for our sins.

2. That to bear sin is to suffer the punishment due to sin, and that this is the sense in which Jesus bore sin.

3. That Jesus needed and obtained justification from our sins (transgressions) otherwise he would have remained in the grave eternally, because the penalty for our sins is eternal death.

Are these doctrines true? Are they Christadelphian doctrines in harmony with the things most surely believed among us? And most important of all—are they Scriptural, in harmony with the inspired words of God's Holy men, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit?

If they are true, then the words "mercy" and "forgiveness," as related to God's dealings with man, must be stricken out of our Bibles.

Because—If Christ bore the punishment due us, there is no mercy manifested to us by God; when a debt is paid there is no forgiveness, when a penalty is endured, there is no mercy manifested. How can it be said that God forgives our sins if He has already exacted the punishment?

Because—If the sinner is allowed to go unpunished because the penalty of his sin has been exacted from another who might offer to bear it, God surely could not be said to have pardoned the sinner; He would simply have transferred the punishment from one person to another.

Therefore our Bibles would have to be changed, certain well known passages would require alteration to be in harmony with Bro. Strickler's ideas:—

Rom. 4-7—"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven" would have to be altered to read, "Blessed are they, the punishment for whose sins has been exacted from Jesus."

Micah 7-13 — "He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy" would have to be changed to read, "He retaineth not his anger forever, because Jesus has born the penalty and punishment due to us for our sins."

John 3-17—"God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten son" would have to be changed to, "God so loved the world, that he chastened Jesus for their sins, and by exacting the punishment of their sins from Him, He saved them from eternal death."

Bro. Strickler sadly confuses the words "suffering" and "punishment." Punishment is suffering incurred by personal guilt and cannot be transferred from one person to another. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." Ezek. 18-20. Therefore, the sufferings of Christ cannot be regarded as punishment, or the infliction of a penalty. The Scriptures teach that "Christ suffered for sin, the just for the unjust" in the sense that the suffering of Christ formed the basis on which God remits sin, but they never teach or imply that Jesus was punished for sin, or bore the penalty of sin. If Bro. Strickler is right; if as he claims, God exacted from Jesus the penalty due us, then there is in no case a remission of the

penalty, it is simply a transfer of the punishment from the guilty to the innocent. The facts are that the penalties for disobedience of God's law are against the sinner himself, and no other. The sin and the penalty for the sin go together, they pertain to the same person, they are never transferable to another person, they cannot be separated except by pardon of the sinner himself. God's law makes no provision for the transfer of guilt, and therefore, no transfer of punishment; either the guilty is pardoned, and the penalty remitted, or he himself, personally, and no one else, suffers the punishment of his sin. Men may theorize, but no theory can disprove plain, well known and well established Bible facts.

Bro. Strickler's great mistake is that he must have some one punished for sin before God pardons the sinner. He expresses surprise that a brother "seems to stand appalled that God should exact the punishment due to sin, before He forgives sin," and that his questioner "does not consider that Christ suffered the punishment due to us for our sins."

He seems to misunderstand entirely the object of the sacrifice of Christ, and fails to realize that it was not to secure the punishment of sin, but the remission of sin. Its purpose was to "take away the sin of the world" not to punish the sin of the world, and Bro. Strickler's teaching on this point is as far from the truth, as day is from night.

The idea needs to be deeply impressed on the minds of all who would understand this subject, that when God forgives, He does not punish, and when He punishes He does not forgive: that when the penalty for the sin is exacted God cannot be said to have pardoned the sinner. Instead of Bro. Strickler's theory that God exacted from Jesus the penalty due to us before He forgives, the plain, simple truth of the Bible is that when God forgives, no one suffers the penalty. "If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die." Ezek. 18-21. If Bro. Strickler's ideas are true, the reason would be that the penalty has been exacted from Jesus; the Bible reason is, because "he delights in mercy."

"He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Ps. 103-10-12. If Bro. Strickler is right, God has dealt with Jesus after our iniquities and exacted from him the punishment due us, and after so exacting the penalty, has forgiven us.

them "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Ps. 103-13. But it would be a strange pity that would move a father to exact the penalty of one child's sin from an innocent member of the family before he would forgive the erring child. And it would be a strange God indeed that would do this. The God of the Bible certainly does not deal with us in that way, and Bro. Strickler is a "setter forth of strange Gods" when he teaches such doctrines.

As usual Bro. Strickler quotes much scripture to prove

his theories, and as usual also, they do not prove them.

"The chastisement of our peace was upon him" is used to prove that Jesus was punished for our sins, and the meaning of the word "Chastisement" is taken from a dictionary (Webster's) which gives the meaning of twentieth century English words, instead of from Young's Concordance, or similar works, which give the meaning of the original Hebrew words, and a glance at Young's will show why Webster's definition was preferred.

"This commandment (to lay down my life) have I received of my Father" is given as proof that the punishment was exacted from Jesus.

"Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures" may be good evidence to Bro. Strickler, but it will not appeal to many as proving that his death for our sins was a punishment for our sins.

And so with all the Scriptures quoted as proof of this heresy; they fail as evidence for the theories advanced, because no such idea is taught by God in His word.

It is not true to teach that God forgives our sins because Christ suffered the penalty and punishment due us for those sins.

The truth of the Bible is that God so loved us that through what was accomplished by Christ in His life and in His death, a way has been provided for the forgiveness of sins so that no one would suffer the penalty or punishment for the sins remitted.

Bro. Strickler is far astray from Scriptural teaching on the subject of sin-bearing. In his pamphlet, "A Defense" he goes very fully into this subject. Twenty-one passages of Scripture are quoted, and then Bro. Strickler says, "From these many scripture testimonies the proof is clear, positive and without doubt, that the Bible teaches that to bear sin, means to suffer punishment under the wrath and displeasure of God." In view of the fact that Bro. Strickler teaches that Jesus, the great sin-bearer, of whom the Mosaic sin-bearers were but a figure, bore sin by bearing the penalty and punishment due to us for our sins, a study of the proofs given is interesting.

One passage, Heb. 9-25, refers to Jesus, and will be dealt with later. Of the balance, seventeen refer to transgressors of God's law, who were to suffer the penalty of their sin. Three passages refer to divinely appointed sin-bearers, who, although they bore sin, did not suffer the penalty of the sins they bore. Of course, if Bro. Strickler contends that Jesus is the antitype of the sinful, unrepentant Israelite who died for his own sin, because he had not had that sin taken away by the means God had appointed, then he is correct, for the unforgiven sinner certainly suffered the penalty of his sin. But if he believes that Jesus is the antitype of the divinely appointed sin-bearers under the law, then he is wrong, for in all the three passages he quotes, not one of the God chosen sin-bearers suffered any penalty for the sin borne. Of course, Bro. Strickler believes that Jesus was the antitype of Aaron and the

divinely appointed high priests, and not of the wicked unrepentant sinner, and to get over the fact which makes void all his theory, the fact that the antitypical sin-bearers did not suffer the penalty of the sins borne—he makes the amazing claim ("Out of Darkness" page 71) that this is the reason why the Aaronic priesthood was spoken of as "Faulty," Heb. 8-7-8. In his own words, fault was found with the Aaronic mediatorial priesthood "because the mediator could not enter into the most holy place with his own blood, but with the blood of animals; therefore, he could not represent in his own person the wages due to sin, which is death violently administered."

The one simple fact that the Mosaic sin-bearers did not suffer the penalty of the sins they bore, disproves countless pages of the theory that "to bear sin is to bear the penalty and punishment due to sin."

And a further study of the subject of sin-bearing shows the error of Bro. Strickler's theories. What are the real facts?

Sin-bearing comes prominently before us in the Mosaic law. Not only was the Mosaic Law given that sin might become exceeding sinful, Rom. 7-13, it was also a school-master to prepare the way for Christ, Gal. 3-24. Therefore, the faithful Israelite, after reading "thou shalt not" over and over again, not only realized that he was a sinner, but also was taught, by the sacrifice he offered, that God was to provide one sin-bearer who would do once for all time, the work which the Mosaic sin-bearers were doing repeatedly.

In the Mosaic order of things the following were appointed by God as sin-bearers to bear the sins of people:—The High Priest—Exod. 28-38; the Sons of the High Priest, Num. 18-1; the Levites—Num. 18-20; the Scape Goat—Lev. 16-22. All these prefigured Jesus, and the work He was to do in taking away sin, yet none of them bore the penalty of the sin taken away. The sinner, Lev. 5-1, Num. 18-22 is also spoken of as bearing sin, but in these cases is unrepentant and unforgiven. He had not availed himself of the prescribed way for having sins removed, and invariably died in his sin; not availing himself of the divinely appointed means, he suffered the penalty and punishment of his sins. Surely, no one will claim that this sinner was a type of Christ.

The law was not given to teach God's method of punishing sinners; not to teach that the penalty for sin must be exacted before God would forgive the sinner; not to teach the offerer that the slain animal had suffered the punishment that he should have suffered for his sin. The law contained no such substitutionary doctrines as these, either in fact or by implication.

The law was given to teach God's method of taking away sin, without punishing the sinner; of destroying sin without destroying the sinner; and when the prescribed methods were followed the sin was forgiven, covered, blotted out; no penalty was exacted, no punishment suffered. The same simple facts are recorded in all cases: "the Priest shall make an atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him";

X and anyone who attempts to add to this simple truth by implying that the slain animal suffered the punishment the sinner should have suffered, or that God exacted from the animal the penalty for the transgression of the sinner, is certainly going beyond what is written. "If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die," Ezek-18-21. This is the principle on which God has forgiven sins from the beginning of his dealings with mankind, and there is not even an implication anywhere in the scriptures that this forgiveness is not granted a sincere, repentant sinner until the penalty has been exacted from another, whether it be an unwilling animal or a willing Jesus. Such a doctrine is contrary to facts, reason and common-sense; illogical, unscriptural and dishonoring to God.

In one of his letters Bro. Strickler says, "Sacrifice by the shedding of blood was instituted by God in the very beginning of the world to exhibit death as the wages of sin, that the offerer might make this confession in his approach to God." Of course, if this is true there ought to be innumerable proofs of the fact in the Mosaic Law, where the principle of blood shedding is so prominent. But a careful search shows that Bro. Strickler knows more than any Israelite who ever brought an animal for an offering, for no Israelite was ever told that the blood of his sacrifice was to exhibit the wages of sin. Read the Mosaic Law carefully, and note particularly that no Jew was ever told that the animal was to suffer the penalty which the offerer should suffer for trespass. And when the absence of such an idea is noted, think how absurd it is that we in the 20th century have found the real reason for blood-shedding to be something which the offerer never knew, because he was never told by God. So once again we have to discard theory, and look at the facts, which as usual are very simple and easy to be understood.

What are the Facts? The Israelite was to take one of the best of his flock, a perfect physical animal, for an offering. This taught him that sacrifice on his part was required by God, a giving up of something that was valuable and precious to him, before sin would be forgiven; the animal was killed, its blood shed, teaching him further that a life must be given, before forgiveness could be granted. Lev. 17-12. I have given it (the Blood) upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls." "The Life of the flesh is in the blood."

When this was faithfully done the Israelite in the mercy of God was forgiven his sin. The whole procedure told him not of sin being punished but of sin being forgiven—not of God exacting from an innocent lamb the penalty due a sinful man, not of an animal suffering what he the sinner should have suffered. It told him that a kind and merciful God desired not the death of the sinner (and surely not the death of an animal substitute) but that the wicked should turn from his wickedness and live. It spoke to him, not of penalty, nor of exactment of punishment, not even of justice, but of loving kindness, tender mercy, forgiveness.

And the laying on of hands on the head of the animal told him not of guilt being transferred so that the lamb was to die instead of the sinner, but of the means God had provided for the taking away of sin.

Bro. Strickler incorrectly puts the matter when he writes (Out of Darkness, pg. 45), "After sins are transferred blood was shed, the life was taken, because of sins; showing that death was the penalty or punishment due for the sins confessed. The blood was sprinkled upon the altar as the evidence that the punishment had been inflicted." We say he incorrectly puts the matter because of the simple fact that the scape-goat (the animal about which Bro. Strickler is writing) was not killed at all. Therefore, the life was not taken because of the sins. He misrepresents the matter also because in all the passages he quotes on this page, not one of them states, either as a fact or by implication that the life of the animal "was taken because of the sins," or that "the blood was sprinkled on the altar as evidence that punishment had been inflicted." No Israelite who ever offered a sacrifice was ever told such a thing, therefore no Israelite ever knew the chief reason (according to Bro. Strickler) why the shedding of blood was instituted.

Again looking for facts, what do we find? That the shed blood signified to the offerer something far different from the theory of punishment.—Lev. 1-4. "And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him."

Lev. 4-20. "And the priest shall make an atonement for them and it shall be forgiven them."

Such is the oft-repeated reason given to the Israelite. The blood was to be shed not as a punishment for the sin, but for a covering for the sin, which is the meaning of the "atonement;" and offering the blood, the life of the animal, was the means God employed to show in "shadow" how sins were finally and "once for all" to be taken away by Jesus.

Nowhere in the Bible is the word "punishment" or its equivalent, found connected with the word "sin" except it refers to the sinner himself. The sin is spoken of as being covered, blotted out, forgiven; otherwise, it is punished; and the Bible fails to record a single instance where penalty for sin is exacted from any but the sinner. Such is the just and merciful God the Scriptures reveal.

Bro. Strickler lays much stress on Isaiah 53, and says that the evidence in this chapter "is overpowering" to prove that to bear sin, is to bear the punishment due to sin. Let us see if it is.

Is. 53-11. "for he shall bear their iniquities." The Hebrew word here is "sabal" and the meaning given by Young's is "to bear, carry away."

Is. 53-12. "and he bare the sin of many" the Hebrew word here is "nasa" and the definition is "to lift up, bear away."

Is. 53-4. "Surely he hath borne our griefs" and again the word is "nasa" and means "to lift up, bear away."

And the word "bare" in Is. 53 is the same original word as was used in describing the work of the Mosaic Sin-bearers. In both type and antitype, transgressions were lifted up off the sinner, borne away from the sinner, carried away from the sinner, without the sin-bearer suffering any penalty, or bearing any punishment for the sins borne.

But perhaps the most emphatic way of disproving Bro. Strickler's theory on sin-bearing is to take up the Concordance again and find that the same word "nasa" as is used in connection with the Mosaic priest and with Jesus, is used in connection with God himself. The Bible speaks of God as a sin-bearer—not once, but over and over again. And of course, if Bro. Strickler is right, then God himself should have suffered the penalty and punishment due to sin.

In the following passages the same original word "nasa" meaning "to lift up, bear away," is used.

Micah 7:18. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth (nasa—lift up, bear away) iniquity."

Ps. 25:18. "Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive (nasa—lift up, bear away) all my sins."

Exod. 32:32. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive (nasa—lift up—bear away) their sin."

Exod. 34:6-7. "the Lord, the Lord God, forgiving (nasa—lift up—bear away) iniquity and transgression and sin."

From the above it must be evident to all that the Hebrew prophets in their own tongue, used the same word on the matter of sin-bearing, and that the scape-goat, the High Priest, Jesus, and God himself all bore sin by lifting it up, taking it away from the sinner. It must be evident that if to bear sin is to suffer the penalty due to sin, then the scape-goat, the High Priest, Jesus and God himself should all have suffered the penalty due to the sins borne. And as none of them did suffer the penalty, it must be evident that Bro. Strickler is teaching substitution, whether he calls it by that name or not. It must be true as Bro. E. Hill said, "It is not only a substitutional doctrine; the theory and reasoning is inaccurate."

So that instead of the evidence being "overpowering" there is nothing in Isaiah 53 "to prove that to bear sin is to bear the punishment due to sin."

And what can be said about the answer to the third question? Is it true that the Bible teaches such an absurd doctrine as that Jesus needed and obtained justification from our sins before God would raise him from the dead? Is it Bible teaching that the penalty of our sins, eternal death, was on Jesus the bearer of our sins, and that by becoming justified from our sins, God released him from the penalty and he (Jesus) could then, and only then, be raised to immortality?

In view of Bro. Strickler's answer to the other questions, it must be said that this answer is logical and it completes the chain of the most unscriptural theory that has been put

forward in Christadelphian circles for many years. The first question that comes to the mind is, that if Jesus obtained justification from our sins, why do the Scriptures teach that we ourselves, require justification from the same sins? Is a double justification necessary? Why do we need justification from transgressions for which the penalty has already been exacted from Jesus, for which the punishment has already been suffered by Jesus, and from which justification has already been obtained by Jesus? Surely, if these ideas are true, the old church hymn is right; "Jesus did it All" and there should be nothing for us to do at all in the matter.

What is the Bible teaching on justification? The word "justify" means "to make or declare right." Sinners are not "right" or righteous in God's eyes, but in His mercy, he has made it possible for them to get into that favorable position. And so the Bible tells how we can be made right or be justified, but in all cases it is the sinner and not Jesus, who requires the justification. Rom. 3-24 — "Being justified freely by his grace." Rom. 5-1 — "Being justified by faith." Rom. 5-9 — "Being justified by his Blood." Gal. 2-16 — "Justified by the faith of Jesus Christ." Acts 13-39 — "By him (Jesus) all that believe are justified."

So that it is the transgressor of God's law who needs and who obtains (on certain terms) justification. It is obtained by faith, by Jesus' blood, by God's grace, by belief in Jesus, etc. In other words, by the great sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus, a means has been established in God's mercy whereby sins can be forgiven, transgressors can be pardoned, and sinners justified or made right in God's sight. Jesus "was raised for our justification," Rom. 4-25, not his own, and because of his obedience unto death God has made him the means by which we, the sinners, can obtain "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

Of all the passages Bro. Strickler quotes to prove this absurd theory, only one, Rom. 6-7, bears any semblance of proof. This verse says "for he that is dead is freed (justified) from sin." Bro. Strickler says "undoubtedly it is Christ that was referred to" in this verse. We say that undoubtedly it was not Christ that was referred to. It was the person referred to in the previous verses; the one who had been buried with Christ by baptism into death, who had risen from the water to walk in newness of life, who had been planted in the likeness of his death in the hope of being raised in the likeness of his resurrection; the one who had crucified the old man, in order that henceforth he might not serve sin; such an one, being dead to sin, having had his sins washed away in the waters of baptism, such an one is, on coming out of the water, justified from sin. The Bible never speaks of Jesus needing justification from anything, least of all, from our sins. It is full of evidence from Genesis on, that we ourselves need justification from our sins, and that if justification is not obtained, we must ourselves bear the penalty, "the wages of sin is death."

Bro. Strickler's theory regarding penalty and punish-

ment makes it necessary to put forward the absurd teaching that Jesus needed justification from our sins. According to his theory, the penalty of our sins is eternal death, therefore, the only way to account for the fact that Jesus rose from the grave and did not die eternally, was to invent the totally unscriptural theory that Jesus obtained justification from those sins. Surely no doctrine more unreasonable, illogical and unscriptural was ever put forward.

Bro. Strickler quotes frequently from the writings of both Dr. Thomas and Bro. Roberts to prove that he is teaching the same things they taught, but these proofs, like his Scriptural ones, fail to support (with one exception) his theory of penalty and punishment and justification.

In all the quotations from Dr. Thomas' writings, Bro. Strickler does not bring forward one proof that the Doctor believed that the death of Jesus was the punishment or penalty due to us for our sins. He can and does find plenty of evidence to support the true scriptural teaching that Jesus as the antitype of the High Priest, bears away (by forgiving) the transgressions of his people, but he cannot and does not find any evidence that Dr. Thomas ever taught that in bearing away our sins Jesus suffered the penalty or punishment due us for those sins, and in this difference lies all the difference between simple and beautiful truth based on Bible teaching on the one hand, and unscriptural and illogical heresy based on theory alone, on the other.

In the writings of Bro. Roberts one statement, and only one, has been found which supports Bro. Strickler's theory of penalty, and Bro. Strickler quotes this over and over again. It is in Christadelphian 1873, pg. 554. In it Bro. Roberts says, "It was 'for us' he thus was slain; for the violent death was the penalty due to the many offences that hold us captive." In all Bro. Roberts' writings, before or after this period, no trace of a similar statement can be found; at no other time, except during this controversy called Renunciationism, did Bro. Roberts ever say that the death of Jesus was the penalty due us. Shortly after, Christadelphian 1874, page 177 we find this, "His (Jesus) blood, having been shed under this covering of righteousness it availed as an atonement for all who were under it through the faith of him. The blood of Jesus is, therefore, not a payment of the penalty of sin, death, but for a reconciliation on behalf of the living."

And in later years Bro. Roberts beautifully expresses the truth on the matter by writing (Law of Moses, page 161), "Christ did no sin, but he inherited the condemnation of sin by deriving his nature from a daughter of Adam, the condemned; and he was considered as having the sins of his people laid upon him, in so far as the sins of his people were to be forgiven for the sake of what should be done in him."

Bro. Roberts preached and wrote on the truth for about 30 years. The marvel is not that he made this one mistake on such an intricate subject, but that he did not make

many. Sensible brethren will not take one statement by Bro. Roberts against all else he has written and say that this one mis-statement, written under the terrible strain of the Renunciationist Controversy expresses his true belief, and rejects all his later writings to the contrary.

On the other hand Bro. Strickler has been writing publicly for at least 16 years, putting forward as assiduously as possible the same ideas as he now puts before us in this pamphlet. I have before me a letter from Bro. Strickler (since made public by him) written in 1909 in answer to various questions. One question was "Do you believe that it was necessary for Christ to offer for himself, and if so, why?" Br. Strickler's answer was, "Apart from the sins that were laid upon him, and which became his own, and for which he made atonement for himself as a human sin-bearer, it was not necessary."

And any brother or sister who has had correspondence with Bro. Strickler will have similar letters in their possession. Therefore, it can be said that Bro. Strickler truly believes in the exactment of penalty and punishment from Jesus, and that God required that Jesus be justified from our sins, whereas this cannot fairly be said of Bro. Roberts, one statement to the contrary notwithstanding.

While in this article we are dealing with Bro. Strickler's teaching on substitution only, it should be said that we believe he is also astray from the truth on the question as to what Jesus accomplished for himself by his own offering. In proof of his note the above extract, also the following from Bro. Strickler's writings—

"I make bold to say that Jesus Christ was not the subject of the redemption that was in himself, and which he secured for his brethren."

"No one can possibly be the subject of Bible redemption unless they have sins to be forgiven."

"The eternal redemption which Jesus obtained, spoken of in Heb. 9-12 was not spoken in reference to Jesus Christ personally, but for those who transgressed under the first covenant."

"It is a shame and a disgrace before both God and man for a religious sect to fight for the doctrine and teaching that the beloved Son of God was required by his Father to first offer himself as a sin offering for himself for atonement or propitiation that he might personally obtain eternal redemption."

"God's method of salvation by the shedding of blood to make atonement, did not apply to Christ."

Comment on the above is hardly necessary. To agree with Bro. Strickler is to disagree with Christadelphian teaching for the past 50 years. The redemption of the Adamic race from the mortality brought on it by Adam's sin is the whole purpose God had in mind from the time of the first animal sacrifice. True, our personal sins, and not our inheritance of a "body of sin" is what stands in the way of our obtaining a "redemption of the body." Never-

theless it is the "deliverance from the bondage of corruption" that God had in mind when he instituted means whereby transgressions could be forgiven. To say that Jesus was not the subject of the redemption that was in himself, is to exclude him from the purpose of God, and also to exclude him from the Adamic race. As Bro. C. C. Walker rightly says in Christadelphian for July, 1921, page 313, "To say it (eternal redemption) was 'for us' and not 'for himself' is to contradict the word of God." How can we remain in fellowship with one who so clearly contradicts the word of God? In the Christadelphian for Jan., 1925, Bro. Walker challenges any one to bring proof that Bro. Strickler is teaching heresy, and we submit the above evidence, in Bro. Strickler's own words, to show that he is teaching a doctrine which in Bro. Walker's own words contradicts the word of God.

Bro. Strickler is very anxious to impress the idea that his theories and teachings are figurative only, and not to be taken literally. As much as to say that if they were real and literal there might be some reason for all the objections made to them, but being only symbolic, there should be no fault found. In other words, he wants us to believe that the fact does not need to be in harmony with the figure or symbol; that it would be error to believe that Jesus actually suffered the penalty due us for sins; but quite correct to believe that Jesus did it figuratively.

And to demonstrate that Bro. Strickler believes these things to be figurative only, he gives the amazing proof from page 89 of "Out of Darkness" as follows—"as a matter of fact and reality, no one can bear another's sins, but they can bear the consequences and punishment due for transgression, and it is in this way that the Bible teaches that sins are borne." If words convey any meaning, the above says that as a matter of fact, not figuratively, not symbolically, but as a matter of fact, Jesus bore the consequences and punishment due us for our sins. And any one who is at all familiar with Bro. Strickler's writings knows that this is the theory on which his whole argument in "Out of Darkness" is founded.

But supposing for the moment that he does believe these ideas to be figurative, how does the matter stand? Looking at the facts, what actually did happen? The only real, actual happening was that Jesus was taken and by wicked hands, was slain. There is no saving value in believing that actual fact by itself. The saving virtue to us in the death of Christ is in what we understand was accomplished by it. And as soon as we look for the answer to that question, we leave facts, realities, and deal with symbols, figures, etc. We see blood shed. The blood was a figure of a life poured out, in obedience to the will of God, on the basis of which God is pleased to grant forgiveness of sins. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls, for it is the

blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." Lev. 17-11. So to the Israelite the blood was a figure telling them that sacrifice must be made to the extent of a life being given, and that when this was done in the right spirit, atonement was made, sins were covered, and pointed forward to the one great offering, "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Therefore, by the blood of Jesus we understand that a life has been given, "He poured out his soul unto death." Is. 53-12. "He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," Phil. 2-8, and "by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Heb. 10-14. Many beside Jesus died the same kind of death, but they could not take away our sins because, while they had died for their faith, their lives had not been sinless. God required, therefore, not only one who would pour out his life on the cross, but one who could also show a life free from sin.

And so because Jesus was obedient all through his life, as well as in his death, "God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." Col. 2-9. "Washed us from our sins in his own blood," Rev. 1-5, tells us of a merciful God who, because His Son laid down his life in obedience to God's command, is willing through Jesus to forgive our sins, blot out the transgression, remit the penalty, put the sin behind his back, remember it no more. "The wages of sin is death," but because Jesus pleased his Father, God is willing on certain conditions, to overlook and forgive, the penalty is not exacted, the punishment is not inflicted on any one; God simply pities and forgives, and that is the end of the sin.

Bro. Strickler sees something quite different. He sees a God who, because his law is violated, is not willing to forgive until the ends of justice have been satisfied, until someone has suffered the punishment due for the sin committed. He sees a God who is not willing to forgive until the penalty for the sin is exacted from some one. To him the shed blood is a symbol of that penalty and that punishment being inflicted on Jesus. Keeping in mind that the saving virtue of the blood of Jesus lies in what we understand was accomplished by it, and that when we look for the meaning of blood-shedding as relating to our salvation we are dealing with figurative things, it will be seen that it does Bro. Strickler's case no good to say that his ideas are only figurative, and not real, because no one believes that sins are actually washed away in actual blood. The Bible meaning of the blood of Jesus is that on the basis of what Jesus did, God is willing to forgive and overlook the punishment due. Bro. Strickler's conception is that the blood of Christ represents the infliction on Jesus of the violent death penalty due us for our sins, and that only after the penalty for sin has been exacted from some one will God forgive sin.

Putting aside all long drawn out theories and getting down to plain, simple facts, the matter resolves itself into the simple question as to whether God exacts penalty before he forgives, or whether he forgives without anyone suffering the penalty.

Despite all statements to the contrary, there are many points of similarity between Bro. Strickler's teaching and the Renunciationalist theory of 1873. For instance:

Christadelphian 1873, page 404.

"What does the new theory say? That God destroyed a life that ought not to have been destroyed, in consideration of which, He is to allow to live a million lives that ought not to live. This is the old orthodox heresy of substitution, the only difference being that death instead of torment is accepted in "satisfaction." It is the old insult to God, representing him as winking at the violation of his own laws; accepting a compromise; destroying where he ought not to destroy, and saving alive where he ought not to save alive."

If Bro. Roberts were writing about Bro. Strickler's theories today, would he not say the following?—

What does the new theory say? That God exacted from Jesus a penalty and punishment that ought not to have been exacted; in consideration of which He is to allow to live a million lives that ought not to live. This is the old orthodox heresy of substitution, the only difference being that death instead of torment is accepted in vindication. It is the old insult to God, representing Him as winking at the violation of His own laws; accepting a compromise; punishing and exacting where He ought not to punish or exact, and saving alive where He ought not to save alive.

Christadelphian 1873, page 466.

"Your theory alleges that Christ in dying paid the debts we own on account of our sins. If this unscriptural representation of the

case were true, would it not follow that forgiveness was ours as a matter of fact, as soon as he died? And if so, how comes it to pass that remission of sins is only attainable by believing and obeying the gospel?"

"And in that case would not forgiveness be a right to be claimed? If another man pays my debt, can I not of right claim exemption from the demand of my creditor? And if divine forgiveness is of this order (viz: remission because of satisfaction obtained) how comes it that Paul says that "the remission of sins that are past" is "through the forbearance of God?" Rom. 3-25.

Would not Bro. Roberts say the following today, to Bro. Strickler, to be consistent with his teachings of 1873?

Your theory alleges that Christ in dying, suffered the punishment due us on account of our sins. If this unscriptural representation of the case were true, would it not follow that forgiveness was ours as a matter of fact, as soon as he died? And if so, how comes it that remission of sins is only attainable by believing and obeying the gospel?

And in that case would not forgiveness be a right to be claimed? If another man suffers the punishment due to me, can I not of right claim exemption from the penalty of my sin?

And if divine forgiveness is of this order (viz: remission, because the penalty

has been exacted from another) how comes it that Paul says that "the remission of sins that are past" is "through the forbearance of God?" Rom. 3-25.

Christadelphian 1873, page 561.

"How say you that in suffering death Jesus Christ paid a debt for his disciples; if he paid a debt for them, they ought not to be liable to pay the same debt; they cannot be "partakers of Christ's suffering." They cannot "suffer for his sake," neither can any of them be "made conformable to his death."

"How say you that redemption was effected on the principle of barter or pawnbroking? If on this principle the giving up of Jesus Christ's life was all that was necessary; if the giving up of his life was the only thing necessary, the bringing back of that life was not essential to make redemption possible; if the bringing back of his life was not necessary to make redemption possible, his resurrection was required for his own salvation only, and consequently the apostle Paul was wrong when he said that Jesus was "raised again for our justification." Rom. 4-25.

Would Bro. Roberts not ask of Bro. Strickler today the following:

How say you that in suffering a violent death Jesus Christ suffered the punishment due for our sins? If he suffered the punishment due to us, we ought not to be liable to pay the same penalty; we cannot be "partakers of Christ's suffering," we cannot "suffer for his sake" neither can any of us be "made conformable to

his death."

Bro. Roberts would surely say the same today, because the principle of barter or pawnbroking is the root of all Bro. Strickler's theory; for instance in the attached letter he expresses surprise that any brother can doubt that God exacts the punishment due to sin before He forgives sin. It, therefore, follows, as Bro. Roberts well shows, that "if this theory is correct, the suffering of the penalty is all that is required; God having exacted that, our salvation was assured, and so far as we are concerned, the resurrection of Jesus was not necessary."

Christadelphian 1873, page 440.

"Has it ever occurred to these Renunciationists, that if eternal death, so called, was the debt to be paid, as they say, and Jesus paid that debt, that the resurrection of Jesus was impossible? I will show before I have done that our inheritance in Adam is not eternal death; that that which stands in the way of our resurrection by nature, is not our hereditary mortality in Adam, but our personal offences; and that what has brought resurrection is not free life; but the personal righteousness of God's own anointed, specially provided in our mortal nature that he might open a way out of mortality by obedience, death and resurrection."

Bro. Strickler, like the Renunciationists, believes that the debt we owe for our sins is eternal death, (Out of Darkness, pg. 53) and his explanation of the embarrassing situation brought about by his theory is that, although Jesus suffered the

ing in the language of the Mosaic figure, the fact that Jesus in the mercy of God, has been made "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Heb. 3-17.

Bro. Roberts used 1 Pet. 2-24 in harmony with the first interpretation; Dr. Thomas used the same passage in harmony with the second, and any brother who has made a study of Christadelphian writings on this subject knows that these passages have been given both interpretations over and over again, by various writers. Sensible brethren will not disfellowship one another over the interpretation of any particular passage, provided—and the proviso is all important—it is admitted that the Scriptures teach both phases. Differences of opinion such as the above leave room for argument, which some keenly delight in, but give no cause for disfellowship.

Bro. Strickler has been disfellowshipped because he goes beyond what is written. He believes that Jesus takes away our transgressions, but exceeds the scripture evidence by stating that before Jesus could take away transgression he must suffer the penalty and consequences due us for transgression; and further, that this suffering of the penalty by Jesus was exacted (demanded) by God before He (God) would forgive.

Bro. Strickler says he does not teach or believe substitution. Does it matter what name he gives his theory? It is just as wrong by any other name, or without any name.

He denies that he teaches substitution but does not deny that he believes and teaches that:

- 1—God exacted from Jesus the penalty due to us.
- 2—That Jesus bore sin by bearing the penalty and punishment due to sin.
- 3—"That Christ died unto the demands of sin, which was death as wages."
- 4—"That the mode of Christ's death showed that it was for punishment eternal, which is what the trespassers deserve."
- 5—"That death (on Christ) had been inflicted to satisfy the ends of justice."
- 6—"That divine justice required a violent death for trespassers of all sorts; that this does not overtake one is through the forbearance of God, firstly in cases where these sins are not imputed, and secondly, cases where these sins are imputed, and were imposed on Christ when he suffered a violent death due to such sins."

Called by its proper name, such teaching is "Substitution." As Bro. E. Hill wrote, "all these reasoners (Bro. Strickler among them) are very anxious we should not think they are teaching the doctrine of substitution; but that is inevitable—it is not only a substitutional doctrine; the theory and reasoning is inaccurate."

Called by any other name, it is just as objectionable, because it is not truth. Our own opinion is that, apart from the teaching of partial inspiration of the Bible, it is the worst departure from the truth since the truth was brought to light by Dr. John Thomas.

We see in it a return to the old Calvinistic doctrine that Christ secured our salvation because in his death he clothed himself with the sins of the human race, so that God inflicted on Jesus the suffering which we deserved for our sins.

What shall we do about it?

Some say, "do nothing, it cannot do any harm because no one but Bro. Strickler believes his theories." Such reasoning is of the flesh, but nevertheless there is evidence that it is doing harm. I have before me a pamphlet written by Bro. J. A. McCarl of the San Francisco Ecclesia who is a member of an ecclesia which claims to have taken no action in the Strickler controversy. The pamphlet is a warm defense of Bro. Strickler's teachings. In it we read the following:

"I think that this is plain enough, that Christ suffered the punishment due us on account of our sins."

"Anyone who studies the scriptures can plainly see that he bore the consequences and punishment due us for our transgressions."

"If Christ did not bear the consequences and punishment due us for transgressions, who did?"

Oh! the blindness of such teaching. Why must some one be found to bear the punishment? Why will brethren not accept the plain Bible facts that when God forgives no one is punished; when he punishes, there is no forgiveness? Why will they not accept the plain teaching that "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" because knowing our frame, he pities and forgives.

In all cases of departure from the first principles of the truth, there is one thing to be considered and only one; that is, what is our duty? Brethren and Ecclesias who regulate their actions by divine commands realize that a sad duty confronts them. They realize that in these last days the oracles of God are committed to them for safe keeping. They know that God has exalted His word above His name, and that that word has been placed in their hands; that they are "stewards of the mysteries of God;" that it is required in stewards that they be found faithful; that faithfulness consists first in "holding fast the form of sound words" and then in preaching that word that others may see the "light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And knowing that faithfulness calls for the rejection and repudiation of all that is contrary to the form of "sound words" they do not hesitate when they read, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; from such withdraw thyself." 1 Tim. 6-3-5.

What is sadly needed in this age, as in all ages past is men of courage, men with a strong and abiding faith in God, men who, rejecting the spirit of compromise and tolerance, go forward in the performance of their duty to God, regard-

less of the consequences; men who are less concerned about the effect of their action on the ecclesia, and more concerned about the effect of inaction on the truth of the gospel; less worried about the size of their ecclesia, and more anxious that the truth as placed in our hands by God through the agencies of our fathers and forefathers in the faith, be handed down to our posterity, if Jesus delays His coming, in the same pure and unadulterated form as we received it. What the truth sadly needs is men, who when faced with apparently unsurmountable difficulties, will not cry out, as did Elisha's servant, "Alas, master, how shall we do?" but will say, as did Elisha, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." With a sure faith that God is still regulating and controlling the affairs of His universe, they will go forth unhesitatingly in the performance of their duty today, believing that what comes tomorrow is in God's keeping.

And such will not hesitate to denounce the teachings of Bro. Strickler as a departure from the one faith once for all delivered to the saints, and to publicly announce that they cannot continue in fellowship with him.

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