

WHAT FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANS BELIEVED

Being a Reprint of a Lecture by Robert Roberts entitled

“THE SECT EVERYWHERE SPOKEN AGAINST”

The Christadelphians are becoming more known every day, and where known, they are "everywhere spoken against." This fact stumbles many. It need not, and will not stumble men who look at things as they are in themselves, and not as they appear, through the medium of popular rumour.

The community developed by the labours of the apostles in the first century were in a precisely similar position, as we learn from words the Jews of Rome addressed to Paul on his arrival there: "As concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against" (Acts 28:22). Not only so, but Jesus gave his disciples expressly to understand that this would be their lot. "The time cometh" he said, "that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). He further said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you . . . The servant is not greater than his Lord" (15:18, 20). No term of opprobrium could be more severe than the one applied to him: "He hath a demon and is mad; why hear him?" (10:20), concerning which, Jesus said his servants were to expect no better treatment; "If they have called the Master of the House Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household" (Matt. 10:25). So far, therefore, as this feature of being spoken against is concerned, it is in favour of the Christadelphians, and not against them.

All depends, doubtless, upon the reason why they are spoken against. In some cases, the reason may be such as can afford no satisfaction. It may be that a contentious, harsh, and arrogant spirit on the part of some bearing the name Christadelphian has given occasion for unfavourable speech. This will be regretted by none more than the true Christadelphian, who disowns everything not in harmony with the spirit of the Scriptures, which, though a spirit of faithfulness and firmness, and courage in the maintenance of the faith once delivered to the saints, is, nevertheless, a spirit of true kindness, and courtesy, and gentleness, so far as the polemics of the truth in a hostile world allow. It is not, however, excessive zeal carried to the point of harshness on the part of a few that has led to the Christadelphians being everywhere spoken against. The cause of the antipathy is much deeper and more far-reaching than that. It lays hold of several reasons. We shall soon find some of these.

Not a New Sect, But the Old Apostolic Sect Revived

But, before entering upon them particularly, it is well to realise, in passing, that the Christadelphians are not a new sect in the ordinary sense of that phrase. They have not originated in any new inspiration or notion, nor in the strict sense, do they owe their existence to a new leader. They are not a new sect in the sense in which the Swedenborgians were so, and, the followers of Joanna Southcote. They have no Swedenborg, no Joanna Southcote. They claim to have received no new revelation: they profess no new principle: they own to no new teachership. They are simply and purely the result of Bible study, thoroughly conducted. They owe their development to the application of a principle, in which it has been customary for all Englishmen to boast--the right of private judgment in the discernment of religious truth. Men rejoice in the work of Martin Luther because they rejoice in this, that the Bible is the word of God, and that God intended men to make themselves acquainted with it, and to embrace what it teaches, and reject what it denounces, however many may be arrayed against the conclusions to which the study of it may lead them.

Now, Christadelphianism is nothing more nor less than the result of that principle strictly carried out. Christadelphianism takes its stand on the Bible. It maintains that the Bible can be proved to be divine, and that it is the only source of divine ideas at present in the earth on the subject of religion; and that all systems and doctrines are to be discarded that conflict with what is to be found in the Bible, however ancient or popularly supported such systems or doctrines may be. In maintaining this, they only maintain what the bulk of the English people profess to believe. If they go a step further, and say that the popular systems of the day are in conflict with the Bible, they raise an issue which may disturb complacency, but which ought to receive a sympathetic attention at the hands of so ultra-Protestant a nation as the British. It is a plain, intelligible and debatable issue, in which there is no fanaticism, or anything to offend the highest culture, or the purest reason.

It is the result of the issue that excites the offence, and causes the Christadelphians to be everywhere spoken against. The ordinary neighbour says he could do with the Christadelphians holding the Bible up; he may even go to the length of saying he admires the fidelity of the Christadelphians on this point; but what he cannot do with is their pulling down everybody else as wrong. Well, this is not exactly the right way of putting it. The Christadelphians put down nobody. It is natural for our good-humoured neighbours to feel in just this way about it; but the question is, are the Christadelphians right in what they say the Bible teaches? Because, if so, it follows that those who reject the teaching must be wrong; and that it is a pity to divert attention from the main issue by questions of style.

The Grounds of Offence

Now, what have the Christadelphians to say about the teaching of the Bible which gives such mortal offence? They affirm two things which the Old and New Testaments separately sustain, though also sustaining both in a general way. The Christadelphians affirm that mankind is separated from God, not only as regards their moral condition, but as regards what may be called their legal relation to Him: that is, they are all under condemnation—all under sentence of death,—a *sentence written in their very constitution*, and that they cannot by any contrivance of their own escape from, or alter, this position. The Christadelphians point, in proof of this view, not only to the garden of Eden, where sentence of death was passed on Adam (and, in him, on all men), but to the system of the law of Moses, which, in all its details and significances, teaches one thing above all others: that man is an exile from God, whom we cannot approach, even afar off, except under the most stringent appointments which uphold the authority and greatness of God and abase man to the very dust.

Now, this contention is naturally very unacceptable to the mass of the people. They prefer to take the humanitarian view, that God is a Being of unconditional goodness, who embraces all mankind in His bosom as a Father, and that although men are sinners, God's goodness is equal to the overlooking of all their sins, and giving salvation somehow or other to all at last. If this view is the truth, let us accept it and rejoice in it by all means; but how is the question of its truthfulness or otherwise to be determined? It is not to be settled by what men think or prefer. It is to be settled by what God has declared: for He only knows. Now, the Bible contains His declaration, and by this the Christadelphians maintain we are bound. They bind themselves by it: they say it is binding on others, whether they submit or not. Christ's resurrection sets at rest all question as to the authority of the Old Testament: for he endorsed it unreservedly as the Word of God which could not be broken: and if he rose from the dead, his endorsement proves all: and therefore this, that man is alien from God and cannot restore himself. This is an unpopular doctrine, but true. It is one of the doctrines which cause the Christadelphians to be "everywhere spoken against."

Jesus says, "I am the Way"

The second thing which they maintain, and which, if possible, gives more offence than the first, is this, that God has appointed a way by which man may return from his alienated position, and obtain the forgiveness of his sins, and the hope of life everlasting. They say there is no other than this one way. They say that this "way" centres in one man-Jesus Christ, the Son of God: apart from whom, no man can be saved, however estimable he may be or consider himself in a moral sense. Are they to be considered "uncharitable" for believing and maintaining this, if it be true? Who can deny its truth that believes the Bible? Has not Jesus proclaimed himself "the Way?" Has he not said: "No man cometh unto the Father but by me?"-(John 14:6)-and "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins". (John 8:24). Has not Peter, his leading apostle, proclaimed, "There is: none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved"? (Acts 4:12). And Paul, "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38). It may be considered narrow; it may be stigmatised as uncharitable; but it cannot be proved unscriptural, for the Christadelphians to maintain that there is only one way to salvation, and that way is in Christ, and in Christ alone.

Belief of the Gospel Necessary for Salvation

But here comes another point of objection. Our opponents, some of them, do not object to Christ being held up as the way of salvation. They say, "We rather admire that, and would say 'Amen' to that; but we object to the idea that Christ will save none but those who hold Christadelphian doctrines." Here there is a little unhappiness in the way of putting the objection. It obscures the issue to put it in that way, and raises needless prejudice. The question is, "Will any be saved but those complying with Christ's own conditions?" To this, there can be but one answer on the part of those who believe the Bible, and that answer is, No, however harshly it may appear to bear. The ways of God are unimpeachable, however hard they may seem sometimes from a human point of view, as when He destroyed the antediluvians, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, the army of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, seven nations of Canaan by the sword of Israel; or as when He required His own dear Son to submit to crucifixion. It may seem to men hard, but it cannot be held unreasonable that Christ should dictate the conditions on which alone men will be saved.

The question is, what are the conditions? In answer to this, nothing is more undeniable than the fact that the very first condition is a *belief of the Gospel*. Friends may object to the condition, but they cannot deny that it is the condition as laid down both by Christ and his apostles. What did Christ send out his apostles to do? To preach the gospel. To what end did he wish them to preach the gospel? He answers this in what he said to them when sending them: "He that *believeth* and is baptised shall *be saved*: he that believeth not shall be condemned." You must be aware how distinctly the apostles themselves reiterated this view, Paul speaks of the gospel as "the gospel of your salvation" (*Eph. 1:13*). He says men are *saved by it* "they keep in memory the things" constituting it (I Cor 15:2). He says, "It is the power of God unto salvation to *every one that believeth*" (*Rom. 1:16*), and that "it hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching (it) to save them that believe" (1Cor. 1:21).

Why, then, should the Christadelphians be spoken against, for maintaining that men cannot be saved without believing in the gospel? They maintain only what the apostolic writings reveal. It is popular objection that is in fault. It opposes what the apostles teach.

What is "the Gospel"?

But, here again comes our well-meaning, religious-minded friend. He says: "It is not your contention for the necessity of the gospel, that we object to. We object to your version of the gospel." Well, let us see. It comes to this: What is the gospel, as apostolically proclaimed for the salvation of men? When the apostles speak of the gospel, they speak of a definite conception of truth, of course. It is not an indefinite phrase in their mouth. In the abstract, it means glad tidings: but glad tidings, before they can be glad tidings, must be definite. This is their very character-definiteness. Without definiteness they cannot be glad tidings: for who can be glad about that which is indefinite? Glad tidings are definite news of some sort, that on account of their intelligibility in some direction of goodness, make the believers of them glad. Now the apostles not only preached glad tidings, but they spoke of them as "the" glad tidings-the Gospel which makes the necessity for definiteness more imperative still. The question is, what was the Gospel they preached?

Before ascertaining the New Testament answer to this question, let us ask for a moment, what is the gospel preached in the churches and chapels? Is it not this, that Christ *died* to save immortal souls from *the torments of hell*? No one will demur to this as a correct definition of the gospel, as understood by all denominations of Christendom. Now, the Christadelphians say that this is not the gospel the apostles preached. This assertion of theirs may stagger people, and offend them; but it certainly ought also to arouse them, for, if it is true, of what overwhelming importance is the fact to all who believe the popular gospel-and there are thousands upon thousands who do so without considering for a moment whether it is apostolic or not. The assertion can be disproved, if it is untrue. On what grounds do the Christadelphians advance it? On a variety of grounds.

How the Bible Speaks of "Souls" and "Immortality"

First, they say the popular gospel cannot be the true gospel, because the Bible nowhere speaks of "immortal souls," upon whose supposed necessities the popular gospel is based. "Immortal soul" is an unscriptural collocation of terms altogether. It belongs to Greek philosophy, not to apostolic Christianity. Search and see. You will not find "immortal soul" in the Bible anywhere. You will find "immortal" and you will find "soul," but the words together -never. You may think, at first, the words being apart makes no difference; it makes all the difference in the world. Hunt up all the cases in which you find the word "immortal," and you will find it is *never applied to man at all*. God only is said to be "immortal" (1 Tim. 1:17); *He only* is said to have "immortality" (6:15). If "immortality" is ever spoken of in connection with man, it is always as a thing he has to "seek for" (Rom. 2:7), a thing put on as a clothing of his mortal nature at the resurrection-if he be accepted (1 Cor. 15:53; 2 Cor. 5:4). As for "soul," you will find this word hundreds of times; but you will find it used in a way that excludes the idea of its being an immortal thing. It is used of beasts (Gen. 1: 20; Num. 31:28); of bodies (Josh. 11:11); of fishes (Rev. 16:3); of living men (Lev. 5:2); and of the mind (Psa. 6:3; 33:20). The last is the only use of the word that you may think favours the popular idea; but on reflection you will find this is empty as well. You must first prove the mind immortal before you can logically see immortality in a term applied to the mind. Now, concerning the mind of man, it is said that it ceases to act when a man dies (Ecc. 9:5,10; Psa. 146:4), which is a complete disproof in itself of the idea that the mind is an immortal thing.

The Necessity of Resurrection and Judgment

The fact is, the Bible knows nothing of immortal-soulism. Immortal-soulism is a speculation of the pagans, coming to birth first in Egypt, and afterwards imported into Greece, where "the wise of this world," whose wisdom Paul says is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 1:21), adopted it with improvements. It is opposed to what the Bible reveals concerning man, which is expressly to the contrary effect. The Bible

reveals that "death has entered into the world" because of sin (Rom. 5:12; Gen. 3:19), that it has passed upon all men (Ibid), and that consequently all men *are mortal* and die (Job 4:17; Psa 89:48), and when dead, it teaches they are truly dead and know nothing at all. It is here where the Bible doctrine of resurrection finds its place. If men die and dissolve in the grave, it is obvious that if they are to have another life, they must rise from the dead. And this is the very doctrine of a future life taught in the Bible. "Since by man came death, by man came also *the resurrection of the dead*" (1 Cor. 15:21). Christ proclaimed himself the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), and pointed to the resurrection as the time when men should receive the results of their present life (John 5:29; Luke 14:14). But in the popular system there is no need for the resurrection. According to that system, men pass out of their bodies into a state of reward or punishment.

The Gospel and the Death of Christ

Now, if there be no immortal soulism in the Bible, it follows that a gospel which is contrived for the salvation of immortal souls cannot be the Bible gospel. But there is another reason why the popular definition of the gospel already advanced cannot be a true one. It makes the death of Christ the essence of the gospel. Far be it from us even to seem to lessen the importance of the death of Christ. In its place in redemption, it is of an importance that cannot be exaggerated; but the question now is as to the gospel. Is the death of Christ the gospel? It cannot be so for this all-sufficient reason that the apostles preached the gospel *before the death of Christ occurred, and while they were yet ignorant that it was to take place*. No one will dispute the first point in view of Luke 9:6 ("The disciples departed and went through the towns, *preaching the gospel*"): and no one can dispute the second in view of the fact that when Jesus informed his disciples of his approaching arrest and death, "they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them" (Luke 18:34). We ask another question, and the evidence is complete.

What was it they preached in preaching the gospel? The answer is found many times throughout the apostolic record. They preached what Jesus preached, and Jesus "preached the kingdom of God." "He went throughout every city and village preaching and showing *the glad tidings of the kingdom of God*" (Luke 8:1). "He went about all Galilee, teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching *the gospel of the kingdom*" (Matt. 4:23). "He said, I must preach *the kingdom of God* to other cities also, for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43). Of the apostles themselves, it is specifically declared that "He sent them to preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:2). This was all while Christ was on earth. When he had departed to heaven (after his resurrection), we find the apostles continuing to preach the same gospel: "preaching *the things concerning the kingdom of God* and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). "Preaching *the kingdom of God* and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31; see also verse 23; also chapters 20:25; 19:8).

The Kingdom of God

Now what the Christadelphians say is, that looking to this evidence, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the gospel preached by the apostles was the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and not the death of Christ. The death of Christ was afterwards (after Christ's ascension) added to the gospel of the kingdom as the sacrificial provision God made for the forgiveness of those who should approach Him in the belief of the gospel of the kingdom and faith in the shed blood of His son. But it was not proclaimed as the central idea of the gospel. It was a corollary of it: if you will, an ingredient of it; an essential supplement to it. But primarily, the gospel was the gospel of the kingdom. And the Christadelphians have to ask, what is this Kingdom of God, the announcement of whose approach is glad tidings? And in answer to this, they do not put forward their own guesses. They hold fast by the testimony of the Scriptures. They note that the apostles expounded the Kingdom of God from the

prophets (Acts 28:23). They find Paul saying the gospel was promised in the prophets (Rom. 1:2): and that in preaching the gospel, "he said none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26:22). Consequently, they feel themselves justified in looking to the prophets for a correct idea of the Kingdom of God—an idea which they find abundantly confirmed by the apostles. They can suggest no more expressive definition of it than is found in the prophet Daniel, who, speaking of the upshot of human history, says, "The God of Heaven shall set up a *kingdom which shall never be destroyed*; it shall not be left to other people. It shall break in pieces, and consume all other kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2: 44.) A kingdom to be set up by the God of heaven must be the Kingdom of God; and if it is to stand for ever when the kingdoms of history have been overthrown, it must stand for ever upon earth. They further read in the last book of the New Testament of a time when the "*kingdoms of this world* become *the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Therefore, they say the territorial groundwork and locality of the Kingdom of God is to be sought for in the earth at present occupied by the kingdoms of men—an earth which Jesus said the meek should inherit (Matt. v. 5), which they never have done yet.

This is a mere rough sketching out of the ground. When the prophets are looked into in detail, a great amount of information is discoverable concerning the Kingdom of God. Its divine centre is found to be located in the land God promised to Abraham, which he will then possess—the land of Palestine (Gen. 13:14; Heb. 11:8); its first people the descendants of Abraham, whom God chose as a nation to Himself above all people (Deut. 7:6; 14:2), and which, though now scattered in punitive dispersion, is to be gathered from all lands, and restored to the land of their fathers, and made a great and glorious, righteous, humble, and God-glorifying nation; its governing dynasty, the house of David, with whom God made an everlasting covenant (2 Sam. 23:5)—making the throne permanent in David's family (Psa. 189:34-37), and a covenant which has been fulfilled in Jesus, of whom the angel testified to his mother, "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1: 32).

It is, therefore, no merely interesting fact, but the solemnly imperative corollary of the divine purpose that we are invited to consider when we read that "God shall build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down, and raise up the ruins thereof, and build it as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11); that "He shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth" (Is. 11:12); that He "will gather them on every side, and make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all, and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms, any more at all" (Ezek. 37:22).

All the prophets speak of God's purpose to restore the Kingdom of Israel under David's promised Son—the Messiah—who is also to be king over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9), whom all people, nations, and languages shall serve and obey (Dan. 7:14). "The law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, whither all the nations shall repair to learn the ways of God, beating their swords into ploughshares, and studying war no more (Is. 11:1-4). Then shall all the nations be blessed (as covenanted to Abraham) blessed in the seed of Abraham—Christ, who shall then be manifested as King of Kings and Lord of Lords." "Men shall be blessed in him and all nations shall call him blessed."

The more this gospel of the kingdom is considered, the more it will be seen to be glad tidings. It is the good news that God Himself purposes to provide for all the groaning needs of man, politically, socially, individually, spiritually. If it be asked what connection has this gospel of the kingdom with us as individuals, the answer is to be found in Paul's statement to the Thessalonians (1 Epist. 2:12), "God hath *called you to his kingdom* and glory." If it be asked in what sense are we called to the kingdom, we have the answer in

Peter's words, that, if we please God, "an *entrance shall be ministered to its abundantly into the everlasting kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11). Christ will say to such "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9). "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world *rich in faith*, heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" (James 2:5).

Reigning with Christ

But what is it to "enter" and to "inherit" the kingdom of God? Is it not to possess the honour and glory and wield the power thereof when it comes? If there could be any doubt, it is set at rest by the express declaration that those suffering with Christ now, shall "reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). The exact meaning of this is placed beyond doubt by Christ's own promise to the twelve disciples: "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29). Also by his promise to all who overcome: "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give *power over the nations*, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron" (Rev. 2:26). All the parables of Christ exhibit the same feature of the giving of authority to his faithful servants at his coming. The song of the redeemed puts it forward in the strongest light. "Thou hast made us unto our God **KINGS and PRIESTS**, and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

Those who are to be honoured with this unspeakable honour of reigning with Christ are first to be qualified for it by the transformation of their bodies into the likeness of the Lord's own glorious body: "This mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53); "He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body (Phil. 3:21). "We shall be made like him (1 Jno. 3:2). All these glorious things are comprised in the gospel of the kingdom, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.

Now, what do we hear of these glorious things in the religious teaching of the present day? Not a word; not a whisper; not the shadow of an allusion. Whether it be in the most venerable cathedral, or the most elegant Nonconformist place of worship, these things might never have been written so far as what is to be heard within their walls is concerned. All denominations are alike destitute in the matter: and because they call attention to the fact, is one reason why the Christadelphians are everywhere spoken against.

The Death State

"But then," say our religious friends, "it is not your doctrine of the kingdom of God that offends us: we also are inclined to receive it: in fact, many of us believe it already. It is your awful doctrine about the state of the dead. We can do with the resurrection; but we cannot do with your soul sleeping. It is your denial that the righteous go to heaven that is so awful." Good friends, consider. We merely contend for what you yourselves would receive apart from your philosophical pre-conceptions, viz., that the dead are dead: and we say that, on this point, we have both Scripture and reason on our side. The Scriptures we have looked at already: they teach death to be the portion of mankind because of sin, and resurrection the appointed remedy, and that "the dead (when dead) know not anything." If we say that men do not go to heaven, it is only what Jesus said.

"No man hath ascended up to heaven" (John 3:13). It is only what Peter said of David: "David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:34). It is only what Paul said of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, "They died, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (Heb. 11:13).

What do you say? You say these passages only mean the body. You are right, but what does this prove?—that the body is the person: that in the estimation of Jesus, and Peter, and Paul, the bodies of men, Abraham, Jacob, David, and others, were the men themselves. Why should you be shocked at this? You shout, "Dead bodies!" No: you know better than that: it is the living bodies that are the men, and when the living bodies are dead, then the men are dead, because the living bodies were the men. "But what about the life? what about the spirit?" Surely you do not mean that the life and spirit of a creature are the creature? Have the animals no life? have the animals no spirit? The Scriptures say they have both, as we have seen. Do you say that when the animal is dead, its life continues to exist as a spiritual animal entity once inhabiting a bodily animal? If not, why so much difficulty about man? "God giveth unto ALL, life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25; Gen. 7:21, 22). God is the fountain of life (Psa. 36:9). All life is His: and when a creature ceases to possess it, it goes back to God who gave it (Ecc. 7:7). The life of Abraham and David, is not Abraham and David.

Bodily Life: God and Man

The living bodies of men are the men. Is not this in accordance with your experience? Did you ever know a man without a body? and when a man ceases to possess his body, do you not cease to know him? Can you conceive of a man without a body? Can you conceive of any living being without a body? Christ has a body (though not now a corruptible body like ours): the angels have bodies (though their bodies are spirit substance). Yea, the Creator has a body. "What!" you exclaim, "the Creator possess a body! Is it not written, He is 'without body or parts'?" Yes, it is so written in the 39 Articles, but they are not inspired : it is the utterance of man. It is not so written in the Bible. On the contrary, He is always spoken of in a way that attributes person and bodily form to Him. The very first sentence of the Lord's prayer teaches it: "OUR FATHER *who art in heaven.*" This locates a person in heaven. Christ is his Son: and he is said to be "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), the express image of His person (Heb. 1:3). "The similitude of Jehovah [Yahweh]" Moses was permitted to behold, though Israel saw it not (Num. 12:8). Moses saw His back parts (Ex. 33 :23). It matters not whether this was an angelic manifestation: it was to Moses the similitude of Jehovah [Yahweh]. It is the human similitude. So James says, Men are made after the similitude of God (even the Father—see first part of the verse, Jas. 3:9). The angels are in the same similitude. The Father is the archetype of them all. He is the kernel, or radiant centre-point of Eternal Universal Power and Wisdom, a Stupendous Unit, filling, and embracing, and controlling all creation. The Personal Father is the will-power of the Universal Spirit with which He is one, as the sun is one with its effulgent light-ocean.

One's own intuitions tell him the Father-form must be the human in its highest perfection. What other form can we associate with intelligence and goodness? We may have every conceivable form—the globe, the cloud, the unhewn block, the mountain, the rock, the sea, straight lines, curves and angles, in every possible combination, in every variety of creature; and with none of them but the human form can we associate the idea of love, and wisdom, and goodness. Human in form, in the main features of that form, divine in substance, the Father is glorious and immortal in nature, "dwelling in light that no man can approach." So that not even the Creator is to be conceived of apart from body. If the body of God could die, God would die; but this is a physical impossibility. The body of God and the universal spirit of God are one, and eternal, and the basis of all existence, and cannot die. But the body of man can die, and, therefore, man dies. When the body of man rises from the grave, man rises again to renewed and glorious life.

Concerning Christ

"But then," says our friend, "the Christadelphians have such dreadful ideas of Christ." Nay, good friends. We but receive the apostolic testimony, that he was the Son of God by His begetting by the Spirit of God (Luke 1:35): that though thus begotten of God, he was a man "made in all points like as we are-- touched with the feeling of our infirmity yet without sin" (Heb. 2:17; 4:15); that, nevertheless, though a man, he was not a mere man, but the manifestation of God in the flesh by the spirit, enabling him to say "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jno. 14:9). If we do not receive the Trinitarian definition, it is because that is both a violation of language (unlike anything to be found in the Scriptures), and because it is inconsistent with the Bible revelation of God, which exhibits to us the Father as supreme (1 Cor. 11:3; 8:6; 15:28); and the bodily Christ as the medium of his manifestation (Col. 2:9; Acts 2:22; 10:38; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Baptism

"You make too much of baptism," say our friends again. A mistake, good friends, a mistake. You would not have us make less of baptism than the apostles made of it? We make no more of it than they made of it. We receive and maintain exactly their teaching on the subject. We say that baptism (immersion in water) is God's appointed institution in which believing men find union with Christ for the remission of their sins. In this we go not one iota beyond the apostles. All believers in apostolic times were baptised, as the Acts of the Apostles show. This is their language on the subject: "Be baptised for the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38); "Be baptised and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16); "As many as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27); "Know ye not that so many of us as were BAPTISED INTO JESUS CHRIST were baptised into his death" (Rom. 6:3).

Hell

"But you don't believe in hell." We don't believe in the popular hell: but we believe in the hell of the Bible. What that hell is, you answer with this question: Where were honourable soldiers interred in ancient times with their swords under their heads? Ezekiel says: "They have gone down *to hell with their weapons of war*: and they have laid their swords under their heads" (Ezek. 32:27). What hell is this? Is. 45:9, 11, informs you: "Thy pomp is brought down to the grave" described as "hell" two verses before (verse 9). The fact is, the word translated "hell" (*sheol* in Hebrew: *hades* in Greek) is frequently translated "grave." Take a Greek and Hebrew concordance of the Bible, and you will find this to be the case. The Bible hell is the grave, which enables us to understand how Jesus descended into it, but was not left there, being delivered by resurrection. Concerning *Gehenna*, also translated "hell," investigation will show that that is the introductory punishment of the rejected which introduces them at last to the final hell of their destruction-the grave, where "the wicked cease from troubling" (Job 3:17).

The Devil

"You do not believe in the devil." Oh, we do. Unhappily, we are obliged to do so. Facts compel recognition. We believe in the Bible devil, but not in the devil of "the church." Who is the devil of "the church"? Let us ask you. You say, "a fallen archangel-once an angel in heaven who rebelled against God and was cast out with other angels that helped him." We ask where do you find your information? You say Rev. 12:7: "There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels." Good friends, consider. What you quote is part of a prophetic revelation of what was to transpire among men after the day when John received it in Patmos: See

chap. 1:1--"That his servants might know *things that shall shortly come to pass*"; chap. 4:1-"I will show thee *things that must be hereafter*. " You quote a prophecy of things on earth to prove a history of things in heaven. But what does it mean? The question can be answered (See *Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse*), but this is not the time. Sufficient that it does not prove the popular devil. Where else do you find him? In Isaiah 14:12, Lucifer, son of the morning, aspiring to set his throne above the stars of God. Read the chapter: see the subject: verse 4: "the king of Babylon"-prophecy of an earthly potentate: and so you will find it in every place where it is imagined there is Scriptural countenance to the popular theory of the devil.

There is a devil: but he is a very large one, made up of much diabolism in detail, having existence and power in places little suspected. He has various names. He is called Mammon, the world, the old man, the flesh, Sin, Satan, and so forth. You have a bit of him in the words of Christ-"Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil" (Jno 6:70). He comes into view when Peter, taking up a hostile attitude to the purpose of God in the death of Christ, was rebuked thus: "Get thee behind me, Satan . . . thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23). He shows in another guise when Paul says, "Ye have put off the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22). Still another, when Jesus says, "The devil shall cast some of you into prison" (Rev. 2:10); and in still another, when Paul informs us that the very object of Christ's death was, that "through *death*, he might DESTROY him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14), which he elsewhere tells us was "the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). Oh, yes, we believe in the devil, but in the Bible devil only, which is the personification of all the evil in the world, which, in various forms and guises, opposes God, and is the slanderer of God, a liar, and the destroyer of man. This devil will shortly disappear from creation, with the hell appertaining to him. The work has been begun in Christ, who has vanquished him in death and resurrection.

The Commandments of Christ

But, perhaps, the main reason of the popular antipathy to the Christadelphians is their insistence on the commandments of Christ as the rule of our acceptance with God. You know, the common doctrine of the churches is that men can have a present unconditional and free salvation in the simple act of recognising the cross by faith; and that salvation, in its ultimate sense, is in no way dependent on the actions of men. This doctrine is naturally a very palatable one, against which the Christadelphians place this apostolic teaching, that, although believing men may receive the forgiveness of their past sins in the obedience of the gospel in baptism, their acceptance at the coming of Christ depends upon their conformity to the commandments of Christ during the time of their probation.

This teaching is constantly put forward, both in the discourses of Christ and in the letters of the apostles. From Christ's mouth, we have the following words: "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jno. 15:14). "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, but *he that doeth the - will of my Father*, shall enter into the kingdom" (Matt. 7:21). "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" (Jno. 15:10). "Why call ye me Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). From the letters of the apostles: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8). "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die" (Rom. 8:13). "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9). "If the righteous shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18). "Let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous . . . He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar." (1 Jno. 3:7, 2:4).

The Judgment-Seat of Christ

With these doctrines is conjoined this fact arising out of them, that all responsible persons must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ at his appearing, and give account, and receive in accordance with the account they render, good or bad (2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10,12; Luke 19:15). Now, the community at large have no relish for such doctrines. They prefer a doctrine that leaves them at liberty. They do not like to be called upon to recognise the world as an evil world-to live in it as not of it-as strangers and pilgrims--"denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly and righteously and godly in the present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:12, 14).

"Come Out!"

What are we to say to these things? If men are to be faithful to the apostolic testimony, they have no alternative but to "come out" from communities that both in works and words deny it; and if being spoken against is the result, they will accept it in the spirit of the apostles, who rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. This has been the decision of many. Their "coming out" has necessarily resulted in the formation of a sect, and they have called themselves by the name "CHRISTADELPHIAN" because of the necessity for a name that will distinguish them from those who profess a belief in the Bible but do not submit to its teachings, and because that name proclaims a fact that Christendom has forgotten, viz, that all who believe and obey Christ are his brethren, whom "he is not ashamed to call such" (Heb. 2:11). But as a sect, they have no sacerdotal pretensions. They are a number of private men and women who have surrendered to the claims of Scripture teaching, by the exercise of the inestimable right of private judgment, and who, on that basis, are seeking to "work out their own salvation" by conformity to the law of Christ in all things. They make public efforts, not because they have anything of themselves to offer the public, but because that public effort is made part of their duty by the law of Christ. Without boasting, they are sure that they have the truth. They invite their neighbours to look into the matter, and see whether this is so or not; and, finding that it is so, to follow the example of others, and identify themselves with "the sect everywhere spoken against."

R. Roberts