

Retrogression - Beware!

It is manifest to all observing and discerning brethren that retrogression is going on in *The Christadelphian* in a way that, if not stopped, will end in apostasy. In opposing the truth on Adamic condemnation and the sacrifice of Christ in order to sustain the recent change made in Birmingham in the statement of faith, it has been found necessary to depart from old and well-established principles and abandon long-used and familiar expressions. Clear meanings of numerous passages of scripture – meanings which have long been accepted because they were obvious – are now found to need radical changes, and all this to support a dangerous new departure. “By nature children of wrath,” must be changed to mean “By sinful actions children of wrath, and therefore, it must be that sinful flesh before it acts sinfully is not under the wrath of God, or under the curse which came upon man universally and upon the earth through the sin of Adam.” Alienation through descent from Adam as long as men are “Gentiles in the flesh” is now ignored and another truth expressed in the words “alienated through ignorance” and “by wicked works” is made to contradict it, and this to evade the truth that baptism into Christ removes one from Adamic alienation to citizenship in Christ; and this to establish the newly-espoused old Campbellite theory of baptism only for the remission of personal sins. “The law of sin and death,” which has always been known to be the law of the scripture words, “By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that (or in whom) all have sinned,” is now changed to mean only the lusts of the flesh: and this in order to try (but in this fail) to evade the words, “For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death,” because this would show that baptism deals with something more than personal sins. So the changes go on in displacing long and well-established truths in order to prop up claims that have of late been necessitated by a false and dangerous attempt to force Gentiles on to the same status as saints in relation to the judgment seat of Christ.

One of the latest changes that retrogression has necessitated is that we have all along been speaking “unadvisedly” when using the words “out of Adam into Christ.” “In Christ,” we are told, and “in Adam” are “scriptural,” but not “out of Adam”. The superficiality of this is most deplorable in one assuming to “answer correspondents.” Just look at it. “In Christ” is scriptural, but “out of Adam” is not. In what sense are we “in Christ” now? We know we are not born “in Christ” by natural birth. We know we are “in Christ” now, because “if any man be *in Christ* Jesus he is a new creature.” Again I ask, In what sense are we “in Christ” now? Does the phrase mean a changed nature of our physical bodies? Of course not. Then what can the words “in Christ” mean but a *relationship* to Christ and all that constitution of things represented by him?

In other words, does not the phrase “in Christ” as applied to us now mean that we are in him *relatively*? Now in whom were we, in this relative sense, before we passed into Christ? Were we not “in Adam” – in and related only to the whole constitution of things of which Adam is the federal representation? Are not the two terms “in Adam” and “in Christ” to be used therefore *relatively*? If we can pass into Christ now relatively can we not pass out of Adam relatively? Still more, is it possible for one to pass into Christ relatively without passing out of Adam relatively? Is it not in this sense the two phrases have always been used by intelligent brethren? How superficial, then, for one in “answering correspondents” to say, “One might as well talk about passing out of human nature, out of flesh and blood into Christ, as to talk of passing ‘out of Adam’.” The logic of this remark is that “One might as well talk about passing into divine nature, into immortality, as to talk of passing ‘into Christ.’” If one can “pass into Christ” without “talking” or meaning that we pass into divine nature, why may one not talk about “passing out of Adam” without “talking” or meaning that we pass “out of human nature, or flesh and blood”?

Now why this retrogression to get rid of “passing out of Adam?” Simply because of the effort to re-establish the old Campbellite theory that baptism is only for personal sins, and not a means of changing from the “old man” constitution of things to the new man. If the word “relative” is objected to, then use the word “legal” if you like, just as it was used in the “Declaration” before it was secretly and recently changed – “To such it” (baptism) “is a means of that *present* (legal) union with Christ,” p. 46. Why is it that we must be asked now to step off from the “ground of the truth,” that in baptism we “put off *the old man* with his deeds;” and are asked to confine our view of baptism to the “deeds” and not “put off the old man?” “Half the truth is a whole lie.” The serpent deceived with half the truth. Let us avoid it. The “old man” as applied to us is the old man constitution of things into which we are born. The “new man” is the constitution of things into which we are “born again.” How can we pass into the latter without passing out of the former? Adam is the federal “old man;” Christ is the federal “new man.” It happened that Dr. Thomas’ words in the same number of *The Christadelphian* condemned the superficiality and retrogression of the “answers to correspondents,” in the following, on the first page.

“The former things being admitted, if men would be righteous in God’s esteem, they must become such *by constitution* also. The ‘good actions’ of a pious sinner are mere ‘dead works’; for the action of a sinner to be of any worth in relation to the future state, he must be ‘constituted righteous’; and this can only be by his coming under the constitution made and provided for that purpose. A stranger and foreigner from the commonwealth of the States, can only become a fellow-citizen with Americans, by taking the oath of abjuration, fulfilling the time of his probation, and taking the oath of allegiance according to the provisions of the constitution. Now, the kingdom of God has a constitution as well as the kingdom of Satan, or that province of it styled the United States. Before sinners come under it they are characterized as ‘without

Christ, being aliens from the *Commonwealth of Israel*, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God (*atheists*) in the world" (Eph. 2:12,13,19). They are termed 'far off,' 'strangers and foreigners,' 'walking in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart' (Eph. 4:17, 18). But mark the sacred style of descriptive of sinners after they have been placed under the constitution of Israel's commonwealth, which is the kingdom of God: 'You that were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ'; 'through him you have access by one spirit to the Father; and are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.' – 'fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel' (Eph. 3:6). In this remarkable contrast is discoverable a great change in *state* and *character* predicated of the same persons. How was the transformation (of state, or relation as well as of character) effected? The question is answered by the phrase 'in Christ by the Gospel.' The '*in*' expresses the *state*; the '*by*', the instrumentality by which the state and character are changed." Now note: "As the constitution of sin hath its root in the disobedience of the First Adam, so also hath the constitution of righteousness root in the obedience of the Second Adam. Hence, the apostle says, 'As through one offense (sentence was pronounced) upon all men unto condemnation: so also through one righteousness (sentence was pronounced upon all men—that is, Jews and Gentiles) – unto a *pardon of life*. For as through the disobedience of the one man *the many were constituted sinners*, so also through the obedience of the one man the many were *constituted righteous*' (Rom. 5:18,19). The two Adams are *two federal chiefs*; the first Adam; and all the righteous *in* the second, only on a different principle. Sinners were in the loins of the former when he transgressed; but not in the loins of the latter, when he was obedient unto death; therefore 'the flesh profiteth nothing.' For this cause, then, for sons of Adam to become sons of God, they must be the subjects of an *adoption*, which is attainable only by some divinely appointed means."

The two illustrations the Doctor gives – naturalization and adoption – should show the "Answerer to the Correspondents" the difference between the change of *relation* from Adam to Christ which takes place at baptism, and the change of *nature* which takes place at immortalization. The illustrations relate, however, solely to the former; for an Englishman, when he becomes an adopted citizen of the United States, does not cease to be English "flesh and blood." The change is a change of relation from one constitution to another in which there is as much of a "passing out" of one as there is a "passing into" the other. Also in adoption, the child does not change his "flesh and blood," but he does "pass out" in the same sense as he "passes in" – from one relationship to another.

The trouble with some now is they confine our being in Adam to the material flesh and blood, without recognizing that flesh and blood is now "*sin's* flesh," "unclean," "far off," etc., and that it must be "clothed," "cleansed," and thereby permitted to come "nigh" to God. So the question is often asked, "Are you not still mortal?" "Are you not still sin's flesh?" Of course we are; but "in Adam"

and “in Christ” are not terms applied to the material state of the body, but to the relationship two classes are in. Applying the terms in the physical sense, however, it is true, of course, that when our bodies are changed we pass out of “human nature” physically into “divine nature”; and in this “passing into Christ” there is of necessity a “passing out of Adam.” This, however, is absolutely dependent upon the relation, legal, mental and moral, or constitutional (use which phrase you like) change which the “washing of regeneration” effects. Beware, therefore, that the “things concerning the Name” are not reduced to the old orthodox “forgiveness of sins.” Keep before the mind that in Adam you are in a “name” in which there is nothing but death, and that in Christ you are in a “name” that gives life – a passing now, relatively, “from death unto life,” and a complete passing ultimately. This is an important matter, for how can a person who can only see the “forgiveness of his personal sins” properly understand the “things of the Name,” and validly be baptized? It is an easy matter to get ignorant people to accept the “forgiveness only of personal sins” theory, and “converts” can soon be made by the hundreds, especially when a meeting becomes large and attractive to the fleshly eye, but it is not an easy matter to bring people out of Romish darkness to understand the beautiful and wise plan of God in “the things concerning the Name of Jesus Christ”; and therefore, while nominal Christadelphians can be made very rapidly, real Christadelphians will always be “few in number, a little flock.” Let us “hold fast to the things we have gained, that we may receive a full reward,” and “that no man take thy crown.”

Thomas Williams
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