

27th June 2019

Introduction

## **1873 Clean Flesh**

Dear Brethren and Sisters of the Lord Jesus.

In looking at the modern history of the community holding Truth as it is Jesus, we looked last month at the year 1866, when teachers of false doctrine in Edinburgh Assembly were permitted to sound forth their objectionable heresies, and the leaders of the same assembly counselled that no action should be taken, and that great liberty of conscience should be given in matters which were non-essential, and the question was to be dropped for the sake of peace. This casual approach to the precious Truth of God's words and blurring of the Truth with apostasy in classifying fundamental doctrines of truth to non-essential matters, has become known as Dowiesm after the ring leader George Dowie, which attacked the very foundation of the fellowship. Positives which came about as a result of the schism that followed, were the work of putting together a constitution, which defined all the elements of essential belief and understanding of the gospel. It was a time of strengthening the things which remained. Going to church in those days was not just popular, it was fashionable believe it or not. Churches were booming memberships growing. It was the rise of Evangelism, with preachers such as Spurgeon, Irving, and Dwight L Moody. People were inclined and interested in these things. Not much else to distract them. How times have changed!! The Victorian times back then were times when there was great sympathy for the teachings of the Bible, and the Bible was found in most houses, and even read by the head of the house. Half of the population went to church every Sunday, and a quarter of them went to non- Church of England, that is Quakers, Methodists and Baptists. And of course, in such a fertile

environment the Truth also flourished and grew. Nearly 300 new members were baptised into the Saving name in the year 1871- 2 alone, despite the fact that 1871 was the year that Charles Darwin issued the publication of the Descent of Man, the precursor to the Origin of Species. Much was happening in Europe, and people seeing change were eager to listen what the Bible had to say on prophecy and the Return of the Jews and establishment of Israel. The final fall of the Temporal Power of the Papacy occurred in September, 1870 and the French Empire was overthrown in the Franco-Prussian war, both aspects mentioned by Brother Thomas who spoke of the need of the fall from loss of temporal power of the Papacy just ten years before. It was exciting times, and Brother Roberts and others like him were busy. The ecclesia in Birmingham numbered some 1300 members.

However, a black cloud came in the death of Brother John Thomas, in 1871 who was much loved for his unstinting and pioneering work in unearthing the Truth, and Robert Roberts went to Brooklyn cemetery for the funeral, and where Dr Thomas was laid to rest. Such sadness was mitigated by the decisions of the community of Truth Holders to hold a Fraternal Gathering, the first one. Many people attended, amongst the many speakers were two leading lights and well-respected brethren Edward Turney and David Handley. It was held in Birmingham on August 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th, and is reported fully in a 76-page double number of The Christadelphian, the report subsequently appearing as a separate pamphlet under the title of " The Meaning of the Christadelphian Movement". It was a huge success, with a marquee being erected in the garden of the house of the late Brother Thomas. A photograph of all who attended, and all the names who went are readily available. But such happy times would not last. In the closing days of 1872 Brother Roberts and his

sister wife lost their young son who they had named after Dr Thomas, and after a few weeks they lost their little daughter as well. But they continued on bearing up, as we can see evidenced by the output of written work in the Christadelphian magazine for example. But a great time of testing was ahead for the young brother of just 32 years old. The two aforementioned highly respected brethren Turney and Handley were based in Nottingham another large ecclesia of some 400 members. In 1873 magazine which Robert Roberts published despite the loss of his children, notice is given in the intelligence section of the grand opening of the Christadelphian Synagogue in Nottingham during which Edward Turney is noted as being one of three principal speakers. The first ecclesia to erect a purpose-built meeting hall.

Yet within just a few months the edifice of the ecclesia under the apparent egotistical leadership had crumbled, the vanity of man exposed. Because at this juncture of the history of the truth, new ideas were put forward wrapped in persuasive words, presented with great authority, by brothers of great experience and prominence. It was in the June of 1873 that this heresy was put forward. It has become known as the Renunciationist Controversy, or Renunciationism. These words come from the simpler word renounce to renounce. This is because the gentleman we have mentioned already a few times, one Edward Turney with certain backers including David Handley published and distributed an eight-page pamphlet which contained a series of "Thirty two Questions and Answers concerning Jesus Christ". These questions concerned the nature of Christ, his relation to Adam and humanity, and the nature of his sacrifice for sins.

The first lines of the concluding paragraph of this pamphlet ran as follows: Brethren and Friends: Whatever I have taught by mouth or

pen contrary to the views of Jesus Christ herein set forth, I now renounce. What he renounced was so staggering and damaging it sought to undermine the very gospel itself, thus the terms Renunciationist "and " Renunciationism."

However the things which had been renounced were true, and the things espoused were lies. What was so disturbing was that the beliefs proposed in this pamphlet were reverting back to an old heresy which had deeply concerned the very apostles themselves. For example the Apostle John had warned of some who would teach this very thing: 1 John 4:1-3 *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

So what were the teachings in this pamphlet, and what was it that was being proposed? Edward Turney excluded Jesus from "Adam's posterity " by defining that phrase to mean " Every human being who has been born of two human parents " (Quest, and Ans. No. 9). An " essential difference " was alleged to exist between " Jesus and the posterity of Adam " (Quest. 11). So much so that " Jesus Christ was not a son of Adam " (Quest. 13). It was alleged that " God gave life to Jesus direct from Himself, as he did to Adam" (Quest. 18), and that in consequence " the body of Christ was not under condemnation " (Quest. 19) but possessed a free, unforfeited life. It was alleged that Christ himself was not redeemed by his own sacrifice (Questions 24, 27), and " might himself alone have entered into possession of life eternal" ! And many other similar statements were made. These

false teachings things were laid before the brethren in a lecture by Edward Turney in the ecclesial Temperance Hall on July 28th, 1873. It was a devastating blow.

How did Brother Roberts react? He who was still quite young, in mourning still, well, he must have stayed up all night in preparation, putting forward a presentation to respond step by step to unpick the new ideas, but old heresies proposed, he had some help from a Brother Shuttleworth who assisting in putting together a diagram also in rebuttal of a diagram Edward Turney had used during his talk.

Here is a copy. So the very next night brother Roberts delivered a reply lecture on "The Slain Lamb," in which the true doctrine of the nature and sacrifice of Christ were set forth. This lecture is still current in pamphlet form, and you might be familiar with it. We recommend that you have a read, and follow the arguments through. We would point out that this controversy has not gone away. There are many who use the name Christadelphian, who teach aspects of this heresy even today 146 years later. In fact at our first lecture in Wales we held recently you may recall Christadelphians in attendance. These subsequently wrote to us asking about what we believed to be the nature of Christ, and they stated in later correspondence that Jesus' mind was the Mind of Yahweh from the womb, that he possessed all knowledge, which of course he didn't, Jesus Christ had to learn like all of us do, as we can easily prove.

Later we discovered that this group are also proponents of what is known as the clean flesh heresy. Because Christadelphians have a propensity for forgetting the past, and burying differences for the sake of peace, and as we saw last month in the Dowieite episode, and they prefer reunions instead of maintaining truth from error,

wrong teachings and errors from the past will keep recurring. This apostacy known as clean flesh is something as we can see the Apostle John alludes to cropped up here at this juncture in 1873. So what was this teaching? Edward Turney and his followers taught that Jesus was born of a free life, his primary idea was that there was no change in the condition of Adam's nature as a result of the transgression in Eden.

He denied that Adam's descendants inherit the inclinations to sin, teaching that subsequent sins are a matter of deliberate choice, whilst discounting the fact that our nature is now biased in that direction. He further taught that Jesus (though descended from Adam), by virtue of his birth of the Spirit upon Mary, had a clean or "unforfeited life", whilst Adam had a "forfeited life". Therefore being sinless and unaffected by inherited proneness to sin, Jesus had the choice of offering his "unforfeited life" to save us who have "forfeited" our lives because we are sinners, or entering in to eternal life achieved without his need of sacrifice. The teaching was that there is nothing wrong with the flesh. In the Slain Lamb lecture, Brother Robert Roberts deconstructed these arguments seeing the grave dangers posed and how the members of the audience so readily seemed to accept Turney's proposition, but that he misrepresented the purpose for which Christ died: and failed to perceive the scriptural balance between Christ's benefit from his own sacrifice, and its primary purpose that we might be saved. One of the first points he makes is a useful lesson, on page 4, *Now, one thing that distinguishes this disturbing heresy more than another is that it cannot express itself in the words which the Holy Spirit teacheth, but is obliged continually to employ invented phrases, and those invented phrases, I will show, contain invented fallacies.* Some of the phrases are clean flesh, free life', forfeited life, physical sin,

atonement for human nature, provisional atonement, and so on. Brother Roberts produced this diagram as we have mentioned. He sought to contrast the truth with the error, in this diagrammatic form, and immediately points out something missing in Turney's diagram. God. This he has represented in the diagram as the sun. He explained that it is God who is the doer of everything, it is God doing the work, that everything exists only through God's permission, nothing is free in that sense, but that God is the originator, operator and instigator in all his proceedings. That repeatedly Jesus so many times explained that he never did his own will but always the will of the Father, of Mine own self I can do nothing.

Robert Roberts then shows this broken line from the Sun towards Adam, broken because although God created Adam, he did not manifest himself in Adam. The author of the Slain Lamb then carefully shows that as Paul the Apostle taught the first Adam was earthy, natural. First the natural then the spiritual. The second Adam Jesus was the beginning of the spiritual, that he is God manifest in the flesh, and not just a mere man. That Adam and Jesus were very different. Adam was created very good. Before he sinned, he had no sorrow or acquaintance with grief, no pain and no weakness. He had none of these experiences, whereas Jesus from the beginning in contrast experienced all of these things, subjected to crying and tears, had to learn obedience. Robert Roberts demonstrates how many of the Messianic Psalms which prophecy of Jesus portray him praying to God and asking for deliverance, to be saved, and as Paul the Apostle makes clear in the Hebrews 5:7, that God was able to save Jesus from death, and was heard in that he feared, and not because he had some kind of a free life. Robert Roberts goes on to show in the diagram, that Adams innocence ended in the fall, and so death came as a result. However according

to the teaching of Turney, and as shown in his diagrams, we are told instead that as a result of sin our life is forfeited, that we are now in debt, and the debt has to be paid, which is eternal death. However, Robert Roberts points out on page 10 Has it never 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? So it is not a debt of eternal death that we have inherited at all, but a mortal nature, and it is this nature which is condemned. This is the language of scripture, it is always safest to stick to it. It is not life which is condemned, but the person, the sinner, the nature which is condemned. Robert Roberts says: It is a fallacy to speak of 'life' as distinct from 'nature' or the man himself"

He goes onto show that Sin had to be conquered in the sin-biased nature and the character of God displayed. He had authority from the Father to lay down his life, which he did voluntarily, and to take it again. He made the choice to do his Father's will that others might be saved whilst being involved himself in every step of the process. He was tried in all points as we are yet without sin. He needed himself to be saved out of death, whilst accomplishing salvation for others. He knew he was cursed under the law, he even told his disciples he was going to be hung on a tree, exact words: shall be crucified, and rise again the third day. He knew he was condemned by his adamic nature and the Mosaic law, so that he could redeem them that are under the law, and taste death for every man. By keeping the law, and obeying it, yet being cursed by it, he nailed it to the cross, because it could have no further claim upon him. He was resurrected, because primarily of God's grace and mercy, and also because of His justice, who would not allow a righteous man who did no sin to remain in the grave. All those who see that their own character is flawed, but associated themselves with the character of

Jesus Christ, and identify with his life death and resurrection through the act of baptism are also made righteous, again through the grace and mercy of God. Christ Jesus came in the flesh, and that flesh is latently sinful. The struggle that Paul the Apostle describes in Romans 7 which we have read is the same struggle that Jesus Christ endured, but he and only he won. He inherited the same sinful flesh, the same nature.

Robert Roberts shows in page 21 of this pamphlet, and that it is here where people get confused, thinking that it is not possible for sinful flesh not to sin, so therefore Jesus could not have sinful flesh. But we are reminded of the passage in the Hebrews 2:14 Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of THE SAME ; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil. Robert Roberts reaches the pitch of his rebuttal, in answering the question how can sinful flesh be sinless? How is he who had sinful flesh able to be sinless? Answer God did it. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh God has done – in sending his son in the likeness of sinful flesh. It was the same flesh, full of the same propensities, and the same desires. But, in Christ, all those desires were kept in subjection to the mind of God, because the Father, by the Spirit, taught him and led him from the beginning." I do always those things that please Him. I do nothing of myself. I do those things that I have learned of Him said the Lord Jesus of the Father. In this mankind is taught that no flesh can glory in God's presence, they are saved by grace and not by right.

The clean flesh teaching of free life, the talk of forfeiting and so on, inaccurate clumsy and deliberately misleading, takes us to the conclusion of Jesus death being a substitution for us, dying instead of us, being patently false, he died on account of us, and as our

representative. He was one of us. A lot of noise was made about the number of brethren aligning themselves with Edward Turney, and how many were leading lights and so on. As if this makes any difference. Since when are the majority always right, it's normally the majority who are wrong. And as Paul said who is Paul, who is Apollos, it doesn't matter, we are not followers of men, but of Christ. In the end the majority at Nottingham sided with Turney and only about 40 remained unmoved by this false teaching of the atonement. Those who were deceived by Edward Turney and supporters all agreed to meet on the basis of the un-condemned Christ. Their words. But not scriptural words. Of course Christ was condemned, as is all man. We all know that, and we have been shown, and perhaps more passages can be shown. The majority went off with a man, who renounced all that he had believed in and preached from the platform only a few months before at the fraternal gathering. How people could be taken in with someone who openly admitted he did not understand the truth, and had preached heresy for 15 years, how could they trust that he understood the doctrine properly now? Why such a change? But so easily people are confounded by reputation and social standing, personalities and peer pressure that standing for the truth comes a distant second. Brother Roberts writes in the editorial of the Christadelphian magazine he published in November 1873 *Now a crisis is on us which puts the work to the proof... A prominent professor of ability embraces and gets reimmersed on a subtle heresy....Accustomed to regard this man as a trusty man of the Spirit they are taken altogether at a disadvantage by his cleverness...The trial is great for the brethren. For some who have been ensnared we are heartily sorry. Not knowing all there is under it, their own judgements have been overborne by the plausible words of one for years regarded as a trusty brother... Where serpent eggs existed they*

*have quickly hatched under this hot wind of doctrine,... The result on the whole will be good, The crisis will find out and separate the carnal from the spiritual. We warn the brethren against danger... and to have no connection with this section of the virgin community* (he alludes to the five foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps. In the event other ecclesias held firm and eventually support for Edward Turney dwindled, and he died 7 years later and David Handley returned to the fold. But were lessons learned? In the 1920s A certain Christadelphian George Cornish of Melbourne, Australia had propounded this theory even from the closing years of the nineteenth century. Later John Bell of Sydney continued to proclaim the "clean flesh" theory. The heresy popular in the Evangelical movement continued to influence those weak in the faith. Eventually it caused division, one faction fellowshipping Temperance Hall and the other fellowshipping the Fraternal Visitor, that is, Suffolk Street. A leading upholder of the "clean flesh" heresy in the United States was Allen D. Strickler of Buffalo, New York. The Buffalo Ecclesia divided over this man's heresy and the trouble spread through the United States and into Canada. CC Walker the editor of the Christadelphian magazine influenced many in America to tolerate "the vagueness of a very old brother who, when questioned, is found to be sound in the faith" ie AD Strickler.

By this time the truth had been safely preserved in the community known as the Ecclesia of Christ. After Strickler died in 1939, Temperance Hall sought for re-union with these Americans and was largely successful for many returned to them from 1950 on. Reunion but was there a renouncing of the false teachings? Or was false teaching tolerated? The advice of Robert Roberts having no connection with the foolish virgin class who had no oil in their lamps

has been ignored, as connections with apostasy remains a firm part of the characteristic of the community today known as the Christadelphians which is why this heresy keeps rearing its head amongst them even today. The important lesson for us, is not to let history repeat itself here, but to have lamps full of oil, that when false ideas do arise, we can identify and refute them with ease.