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the message for yourself

This Pamphlet reproduces the tenth of a course of twelve
addresses arranged for the first Sunday of each month during 1949, by the

CHRISTADELPHIAN (CENTRAL) ECCLESIA,
In the
Midland Institute, Birmingham

To show that it is not only possible but reasonable to believe
those foundation truths of Christianity upon which doubt
has been cast by some modern writers.

Dare we believe?

SACRIFICE AND THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Until the last century, when the Higher Criticism came to this country from Germany, the Orthodox view that Christ "died to save sinners" had never been seriously challenged. Since then there has arisen a growing scepticism as to the truth of the events of the Cross and their redemptive significance.

Briefly stated, the Higher Critical view as lately presented in popular form by Dr. Barnes in his recent work *The Rise of Christianity*, runs like this –

During his ministry Jesus did not expect a violent death, and had not understood that a Jewish Messiah should suffer in that way. After his death, however, his followers did not scruple to weave falsehood with fact "**to make the tragic and disgraceful end bearable to their feelings and acceptable to reason**" (*Rise of Christianity*, p. 160). How the admixture of deliberate falsehood could make a new religion more acceptable to reason is not explained. Nevertheless, according to this interpretation "**myth and marvel**" were added to the bare historical facts of his death to make the lowly, peasant of Galilee a veritable Saviour of mankind. A diligent search in the Hebrew scriptures produced likely, passages to use ostensibly as prophecies some sacramental ideas were taken up from the grossly sensual and idolatrous mystery-faiths current at that time, and the religious patchwork. Which Dr. Barnes makes of our faith is the result. In such manner, we are told, the Good Friday story grew '**by a process of accumulation**

which, though acceptable to simple religious feeling, cannot be accepted by critical scholarship" (Ibid, p. 162)

METHOD OF APPROACH

For the purposes of the present inquiry, the Old and New Testament writings will be accepted at their face value and treated like any other historical evidence. Contradiction among the numerous Biblical writers would demand rejection, but an unbroken harmony; especially having regard to the long period during which the Bible was written, would argue strongly in favour of its veracity.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

According to the Gospels, Jesus took his disciples to the Upper Room to celebrate a feast of the Passover. "After supper" he gave them bread to represent his body, and then wine of which he said "This is my blood of the new testament (R.V. : covenant) which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt 26 v 28). Later he was arrested in Gethsemane, faced trials before the Jewish and Roman authorities, and after abusive and violent treatment was executed by crucifixion. To hasten death, the legs of the two thieves were broken by the soldiers, but when they saw Jesus already dead, one vindictively thrust a spear into his side "and forthwith there came out blood and water" (John 19 v 34-35). John, an avowed eyewitness, adds "And he that saw it bear record, and his record is true, and he (the ascended Jesus, we believe) knoweth that he (John) saith true, that ye might believe" Ever since, believers have been persuaded that they are "redeemed by the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1 v 19), and that he died for their sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15 v 3)

SIN

Remission of sins through Jesus cannot be, understood without a knowledge of the fact and nature of sin itself. Just, as crime is a breach of civil law, the Scriptures teach that sin is a breach of God's law. Genesis describes the occasion of the first sin and explains clearly the moral principles involved. Adam and Eve were placed under God's law and their love for Him should have evoked obedience. Obedience would have ensured continued life, but disobedience brought the penalty of death "Because thou ...hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, ... unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3 v 17-19). They presumed on the forbearance of God, doubted His threat of certain death (Genesis 3 v 3), pleased themselves and sinned against Him. In the last analysis, therefore, sin is simply rebellion against God, and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6 v 23), the execution of the sentence was not immediate, but was carried out through a process of degeneration resulting in death. Children born after "the Fall" inherited their parents physical proneness to sin with the motions of sin working in their members (Rom 7 v 5), and also their deathful nature. The baneful consequences of the first sin are tersely expressed through Paul "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom 5 v 12). Therefore "in Adam all die"(1 Cor 15 v 22)

THE LAMB SLAIN

Early in Genesis there is a marked relation between sin and blood sacrifices, and the two incidents of Adam and Eve and their sons, Cain and Abel, provide significant illustrations. The parents attempted to cover the shame of their sin with fig leaves. Sin is an offence against God, therefore only He can provide a sin covering, and in this case He "made them coats of skins", involving blood shedding, "and clothed them" (Gen 3 v 7, 21). Cain "brought of the fruit of the ground" but "the Lord had not respect" to the offering and rejected it whilst in contrast, Abel presented "of the firstlings of the flock"—a lamb slain—and it was accepted. Paul (Heb 11 v 4) explains that Abel brought the "more acceptable" blood sacrifice

as an act of "faith", and God therefore accounted him "righteous" although he was a sinner s all men. At this stage we shall be curious to know:-

1. Why blood, and in particular the blood of a lamb, was intrinsically precious in relation to sin?
2. How, by the blood of a lamb, and faith in God's provision, a man's sins could be covered and he be accounted righteous without God's righteousness being impugned?
3. How could the blood of a lamb be efficacious when the animal could not understand the principles of sin and sacrifice?

Bible teaching about blood sacrifice is progressively more informative. Abraham was commanded to offer as a sacrifice his son in whom far reaching promises were vested (Gen 22 v 1-14). As father and son went up the appointed mountain Isaac enquired "Behold the fire and the wood but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?". It is reasonable to infer from this that Isaac regarded the offering of lambs as a family practice. In explanation Abraham replied "God will provide Himself the lamb" (R.V.). Either then, Abraham understood Isaac to be in some sense a blood sacrifice instead of the usual lamb, or else God Himself would supply "the lamb" instead of those customarily presented by His servant. That the latter is the case is proved by Abraham later, even after the ram was found in the thicket, naming the place of the test of faith "Jehovah-jireh", which means "Jehovah will provide". Scripture gives no hint that Abraham afterwards received such a sacrificial gift from God, and therefore it is a reasonable presumption, that he died with the expectation unrealized.

The teaching about sacrifice assumed a national importance with the growth of Abraham's descendants into, the nation of Israel. The people were redeemed from Egypt by ten plagues, the last of which was the slaying of the firstborn. Protection of the Israelitish firstborn from the calamity was promised if clearly defined instructions given by God were implicitly obeyed. A lamb without blemish had to be slain on the eve of deliverance and its blood daubed on the lintels and doorposts of the houses as a covering, and the flesh eaten by the inmates. "When I see the blood", said God, "I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you" (Exod 12 v 13). Again, there is a singular emphasis on the preciousness, or value of the blood of a lamb, in this case to rescue from a divine judgment of death otherwise inevitable.

At the baptism of Jesus, John announced him as "the Lamb of God (lit. : provided by God) which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1 v 29). The expectation of Abraham that God would "provide the lamb" was to be fulfilled in a man—the man Christ Jesus. Instead of the elaborate sacrificial system, which was restricted to Jews, the one sacrifice of Jesus. Would be available to remove sin universally in all ages.

Later New Testament writings take the subject to its climax. To believers, Peter wrote "Ye were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot: and blemish" (1 Pet 1 v 19). Paul added "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5 v 7). In the final revelation of the risen Lord, he is depicted symbolically as "a lamb slain" to whom the redeemed from all mankind will ultimately sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." (Rev 5 v 9-13). Contrary to Dr. Barnes we find the whole range of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation combines to unfold Jesus as "an offering for sin" (Isa 53 v 10) and "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13 v 8). Evidently, then, the lambs slain in pre-Christian times were not only an expression of faith in the Saviour to come, but a type of him; and the moral difficulties associated with animal sacrifices are thereby explained.

It is deserving of notice that the law of Moses prescribed the sacrificing of other animals besides lambs, to adumbrate different aspects of the Saviour's work.

THE SAVIOUR NEEDED

Following upon "the Fall", the entire human race has received from Adam the unconditional legacy of sin and death. In the remarkable autobiographical chapter 7 of Romans, Paul faced up to the disheartening facts of his fallen nature with a rare frankness and courage. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not that I do... I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me... O man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body, of this death?" (Rom 7 v 18-24). It is suggested that the idea of the last verse quoted is taken from the ancient practice of securing a criminal to a corpse, so that the putrefaction might pass to the living man to produce a horrible lingering death. In such graphic terms does Paul emphasize sad reality of our estate in Adam: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Humanly there was no deliverance possible. As death came by sin, redemption could only come by righteousness, and "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom 3 v 10). Therefore "none can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him (for redemption of their soul is precious)". Nevertheless, the Psalmist adds later by contrast "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave for he shall receive me" (Psa 49 v 7-15). Truly "man's extremity was God's opportunity", in this case to reach down to mankind with the fulness of His gracious character in love and pity.

THE SAVIOUR BORN

With the first sin there immediately followed the first promise from God of redemption which would be effected through a "seed of the woman" (Gen 3 v 15). "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal 4 v 4). "Unto us a son is given." Isa 9 v 6). "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." (John 3 v 16). The Saviour was miraculously conceived of "a virgin" of "the house of David" by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1 v 26-35). Before the birth instructions were given by God to name him "Jesus (Saviour) for he shall save his people from their sins"(Matt 1 v 21). The angel was quoting one of David's prayers "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand. But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared..... For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (Psa 130). Even David's hope of forgiveness and redemption, therefore, was centred in the Saviour to be born.

THE SAVIOUR'S LIFE

As a child Jesus "was of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord"(Isa 11 v 3). At 30 he followed the crowds to Jordan to be baptized. That a "baptism of repentance for remission of sins" (Mark 1 v 4) could apply to the sinless Jesus was unthinkable, in the mind of John, and he protested. But Jesus insisted "Suffer it to be so now for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt 3 v 15). By the use of the plural form ("us ") Jesus clearly suggested at that early stage that he deliberately determined as God's righteous servant to be one of "us" and "numbered with the transgressors"(Isa 53 v 12). The miracles were an exhibition of God's power, but also a reaching out by Jesus in fullest sympathy to associate himself with the sufferings of men because he was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb 4 v 15). Indeed, in this Matthew finds a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses"(Isa 53v 4, Matt 8 v 17). The Lord's later sufferings were to make this relationship more evident and the fulfilment of the prophecy more emphatic.

His kinship with us was even closer. "He was in all points tempted like as we are", as the records of the temptation in the wilderness show. Greatest marvel is that throughout his life he never sinned.(Heb 4 v 15). The reason for the complete obedience to God and victory over self-pleasing is found in his close

communion with his Father, and continual meditation on the Word "[Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee](#)" (Psa 119 v 11). So thoroughly had he absorbed the scriptures of the Old Testament that at each temptation there would immediately arise a mental protest in a spontaneous "uprush from the sub-conscious" quoting decisive words of scriptural reproof (Matt 4 v 1-11).

THE SAVIOUR'S DEATH

The cross has become the symbol of self-sacrifice and Jesus the supreme example of it, but the object of his death is little understood. The numerous Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament confirm the claim made through Peter that Jesus was "[delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God](#)" to be "[crucified and slain](#)" (Acts 2 v 23). Yet, to grasp the entire truth, we must equate this foreknowledge of God with the voluntary acquiescence of Jesus. Of his life, he said, "[no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself](#)" (John 10 v 18). The sacrifice was more than physical. To "[be as gods](#)" Adam and Eve thought it worth sinning by eating of the forbidden fruit. By contrast, Jesus "[thought it not a thing to be grasped at to be equal with God](#)" (Phil 2 v 6 (R.V. Marg)) when he gave the great refusals to self-pleasing and self-assertion as in the wilderness temptation. "[Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor](#)" (2 Cor 8 v 9). The poverty extended to loss of power, home, friends and: public popularity, being stripped of even the clothes he wore, and deprived of the fulness of the Holy Spirit that he might suffer as the son of Mary unaided by God. He was sustained in the last hours only by faith in God, for all else had gone. In the final agony and dereliction he exclaimed, "[My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?](#)" But the Almighty was still his God—and with expiring breath he cried with a triumphant loud voice, "[It is finished](#)"

THE SAVIOUR RISEN

Sin—using Paul's personification—had exhausted its power in the death of Jesus, because the body of sin had been destroyed. "[For he that is dead is freed from sin: death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once](#)" (Rom 6 v 6-10). The enemies of Jesus made his grave into a prison, but "[on the morrow after the Sabbath](#)" the women found the guard had disappeared, the Roman seal broken, the stone of the tomb rolled away, and the body, missing. The evidence, which we cannot elaborate here, calmly and honestly considered, compels the conclusion that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead. God would not leave a sinless man in the grave; and as Peter, reasoned by the Spirit of God "[it was not possible that he \(Jesus\) should be holden](#)" of it, because he was God's "[holy one](#)" who never sinned (Acts 2 v 24-27). "[He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever](#)" (Psa 21 v 4). "[I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore](#)" (Rev 1 v 18).

THE SINNER'S HOPE

The God-fearing man who feels keenly the burden of sin and the inevitableness of death at the end of the journey of life might fondly hope he could be crucified and buried like Jesus, to be raised to immortal life like him. Such a physical ordeal, even if it were practicable, would be futile though his were a rich man's grave, the angels would not visit it because he was a sinner. Nevertheless, the Spirit of Christ through the prophet proclaims: "[Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth](#)" (Isa 45 v 22). "[God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life](#)" (John 3 v 16). "[Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord](#)" (Rom 5 v 20-21)

God has held out the possibility of our being crucified and buried with Jesus, that we may be raised with him. The identification with Jesus is on the basis of faith and obedience after the, example of Abraham the Father of the faithful, who received the imputation of righteousness, for it. Like Jesus we shall mentally strip ourselves, of every worldly claim (1 Cor 1 v 26-29) and with faith, hope and love as our sole assets of real worth humble ourselves and become obedient unto death, even the death of Christ's cross (Phil 2 v 8). "Our old man is crucified with him. . . that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom 6 v 6). Following, such a mental repudiation of sin, which is repentance (Acts 3 v 19), we are baptized into Christ's death by a symbolical burial in water, and rise to a "newness of life" in him. "If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation the old things are passed away: behold, they are become new" (2 Cor 5 v 17 R.V. Margin). The relationship with the sin-and-death cursed Adam is then severed, and we are thenceforward one man in the life-giving Christ Jesus "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6 v 23). This eternal life will not be bestowed on the faithful Christian until "Christ who is our life, shall appear" (Col 3 v 4).

The objection has been raised that God is palpably unjust in accepting Jesus as a righteous substitute for sinners. But the language of Paul emphasizes that Christ died as a representative of the race and not instead of it. He is one with mankind under the condemnation which came by sin. They are required to be one with him in the righteousness which brings life: so must they be crucified with him, buried with him and raised with him, to become "one man in Christ Jesus" By no means, therefore, can the Apostle's language be construed to teach substitution.

THE ATONING BLOOD

The explanation has not yet been given for the emphasis on the *preciousness* of the blood of the lamb in the Old Testament, and of the blood of Christ "as of a lamb", in the New. Because the sacrificial idea was first introduced in the Old Testament, it is there where the meaning may be traced. In Lev. 17 we are informed that the Jews were not allowed to eat blood in any form on pain of death, because it was reserved by God for a redemptive purpose. "The life of the flesh is in the blood", and "by reason of the life (that is in it)" (Lev 17 v 11 R.V.), outpoured blood represented a life given. Such blood offered in sacrifice was an atonement or covering for sin, and means of reconciliation with God.

But Jesus in the Upper Room apparently defied the ancient restriction when he said "This is my blood of the new, testament (R .V. covenant) which is shed for many for the remission of sins..... drink ye all of it" Earlier he had told his disciples, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" Such a suggestion of blood-drinking was naturally abhorrent to the disciples and any were offended (John 6 v 53-66). Nevertheless in the light of the Old Testament teaching it is not difficult to grasp the Lord's primary meaning "My blood poured out on the cross would represent my life given in sacrifice. To receive my sacrifice in its blood-representation would make atonement for you—cover your sins—and reconcile you to God"

REDEMPTION TERMS

The "roots" of a language are to be found deep in the native soil of a people's ancient history, and on the same principle, the redemptive ideas and terms of the New Testament have their source in the Old. It was not Mithra, but Moses who provided the greater part of the scriptural vocabulary of Paul, and it is in terms of the sacrificial laws which were practised nationally by the Jews under Moses 1500 BC and centuries before the pagan cults which concern Dr. Barnes had seen the light of day, that Paul explains, by the Spirit of God, the meaning of the cross of Christ his Lord. Appreciating this, it is necessary to insist that even in the Old Testament, the terms in question were largely used symbolically as part of a divine picture-language to educate Israel spiritually, and their New Testament usage therefore should not be

pressed beyond the limits of the Old Testament connotation. A few examples should make this vital qualification clear:-

a. *Redeem, redemption.*

In the Old Testament the word translated "redeem" is used for "obtaining the release of a slave by purchase" For example, Moses said, "The Lord hath redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh" (Deut 7 v 8). "Ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen" (Deut 28 v 68). In these divine transactions with nations there is no suggestion that He would receive or pay a literal valuation-price for Israel. The metaphor is carried over to the New Testament where the believer is "redeemed by the precious blood of Christ". Numerous people have "made shipwreck of the faith" by driving this figure to the absurd limit at the of suggesting that the blood of Christ was paid to the Devil as the exact equivalent price for the sins of the whole world. This false idea could not have arisen had the Old Testament usage with regard to Israel been carefully studied.

b. *Sin bearer*

Under the law of Moses two goats were used for a sin offering on the great Day of Atonement One goat "for the Lord", was killed and its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat of the Most Holy Place, the innermost chamber of the Tabernacle. On the head of the other goat "for Azazel" (removal) the High Priest had to "lay both his hands and confess over" it all the sins of the nation, "and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities" (Lev 16) into the oblivion of the wilderness. The two animals clearly were intended to set forth atonement in the two aspects of means and effect. The blood shed by sacrifice brought reconciliation by restoring the way into the presence of God: the Azazel goat obtained forgiveness by bearing away sin.

As with the history of lamb sacrifice, the ritual of the two goats began a divine revelation of type-prophecy which can be traced through the Scriptures. In the notable Messianic prophecy of Isaiah, we read: "Surely he hath borne our grief's, and carried our sorrows:..... the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all..... he bore the sin of many" (Isa 53). The phraseology is evidently that of the great Day of Atonement relating to the two goats.

The Lord "bearing his cross went forth" (John 19 v 17) to crucifixion, and a wretchedly miserable and repentant Peter had been eyewitness. Ever after, apparently, in the mind of the Apostle the cross represented the burden of his sins, "which Jesus carried". "His own self bare our sins in his own body to the tree" (1 Pet 2 v 24 R.V. marg.). In these words through Peter, type and, reminiscence mingle with a beautiful blend of gratitude and inspired understanding.

As with the previous term "redeem", there have also been strange perversions of scripture teaching on the subject of the sin-bearer. Some would imagine that somehow the Lord carried an invisible load of the world's sin to Calvary and secured it there. A realization that the idea is figurative and has its origin in the two goats of the Old Testament would at once remove misunderstanding and simplify the teaching of the New Testament.

c. *Blood of the Covenant*

At Sinai, fifty days after Israel was redeemed from Egypt, the laws of God were given to Moses to the accompaniment of a terrifying display of divine power and presence. The words were written in a book, animals were slain and the blood was sprinkled on the altar, and on all the people present, whilst Moses solemnly announced: "Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all, these words" (Exod 24 v 8). Fifteen hundred years later whilst thirteen Jews are reclining in an Upper Room in Jerusalem celebrating a Feast of the

Passover, one of them hands wine to the others, and says; "This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins". The disciples are startled by the resemblance of the words with those proclaimed at Sinai. What does Jesus mean?

To us looking back on the events of the Cross the teaching is clear. Jesus implied that the Old Covenant was to be superseded by a New. As with the Old Covenant, the New would be inaugurated with blood, but it would be his own. Whereas the Old Covenant by animal blood related Israel to a penal law of God, the New by the blood of Jesus would impart to the believer forgiveness of sin as a basis of a new fellowship and hope in God.

Contrary to the opinion of the Higher Critics we shall insist, as before that "the blood of the Covenant" is a theme with a Scriptural history (See Gen 15 v 9-18, Isa 49 v 8, Jer 31 v 31-34, Zech 9 v 11, Heb 13 v 20) starting from times earlier than Moses, and Its progressive unfolding is strongly in favour of its truth.

CONCLUSION

"Of, the things which we have spoken this is the sum".

1. The atoning work of Jesus is incomprehensible unless the need for it by the human race as described in Genesis and expounded therefrom in Romans is admitted and understood
2. The Old Testament unfolds that from earliest times, as soon as the need arose, God gave promise He would "provide" a Redeemer.
3. In the New Testament the work of Jesus is explained in the idiom of the Old. The sacrificial system and history of Israel form the ground-basis on which the grand theme of redemption is developed in the New Testament. Contrary to the Higher Criticism, therefore, the sacramental ideas alleged to have been absorbed from pagan mystery-faiths in early Christian centuries, are actually found deeply rooted in the pre-Christian Old Testament.
4. That "Christ died to save sinners" remains unchangeably true as a vital message to mankind. The gospel is still "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth".

Peter, who refers to "the precious blood of Christ", adds "to you who believe is the preciousness" (1 Peter 2 v 7, R.V.). The whole wealth of the saving work of Christ which extends through forgiveness of sins to bodily resurrection from the dead "at his appearing and his Kingdom" is available for the believer through faith in the gospel and obedience to it. Dare we believe?

E. WHITTAKER.

DARE WE BELIEVE?

Twelve addresses designed for those who feel that there is a conflict between modern knowledge and religious belief.

The Need For Belief
The Scientific Outlook and the Christian Faith
Christianity and Evolution
Miracles
Biblical Criticism
Revelation and Reason
The Meaning of Inspiration
The Virgin Birth and Divine Sonship
Sacrifice and the Blood of Christ
Physical Resurrection
The Exclusive Element in Christianity