

A Letter on Romans 6 and 1 John 1. 7.

W. Kelly.

(B.T. Vol. 8, p. 175-176.)

Dear Sir, — I am indebted to you, my unknown donor, for a tract by "Adelphos." Like many others, it calls for no notice in itself. There are attacks whose only importance is that they serve to show the state of those who make them; and this is one of that class. The morbid, disappointed, and unruly may sympathize with the writers; but every generous soul rejects their insinuations without an answer to expose them.

It has nevertheless appeared to me that, without interposing in others' battles, it might serve the Lord and the truth to give a specimen of "Adelphos's" charity and competency. I will therefore transcribe, from the note to page 17, enough to put in evidence the tone of the writer, who is plainly one of a small knot of malcontents, whose mission seems to be Ishmaelitic indeed — the effort to fasten revolting charges of false doctrine on their brethren. "One of the most offensive instances of this wrong division of the word of truth that I have lately seen occurs at page 7 [it should be 11] of a tract entitled, 'The Salvation of God,' where we may read that 'the blood of Christ effaces the *sins*, but it does not meet the question of *sin* that is working in the believer after he is brought to God. What does? Do you not know that you *are dead to sin*?' Is then, it must be asked, the blood of the Son of man to be no longer 'drink indeed' to believers after they are brought to God? The exact contradiction of this rash assertion by the Spirit in 1 John 1: 7 will suggest itself to every thoughtful and unfettered mind. To expose fully the objectionable nature of such teaching would require much more than a note. I can here only warn the reader of its direct tendency to foster carnal security in Christians and to obscure and depreciate the true doctrine of the cross."

Now here I join issue distinctly with these men, and I affirm that it is they, not we, who are despising the full work of Christ and flatly opposing the word of God. For not even "Adelphos" can deny that the incriminated tract places the sinner within the doors sprinkled with the Lamb's blood as the only possible refuge for him in his guilt. The question discussed is the distinctive force of the Red Sea and of Israel's passage across it. To this the answer is brought from Romans 6. The believer is there taught that *he died with Christ*, and consequently had to count himself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ to God. Is not this the truth? Is it not the special object of the chapter to show that grace does *not* foster carnal security or cloak a bad walk? It is "Adelphos" who flings away the divine safeguard. Who does not know that this is the crying vice of evangelicalism? Their tradition, even where it does not tack on the law as a rule of life, directly tends to make the blood of Christ the exclusive provision for the soul; especially when it goes the length of repeated sprinklings and reiterated recourse for restoration, as a guilty Jew again and again brought his sacrifice with a fresh confession of his sin.

The question discussed there is what gives power against the dominion of sin in practice. The answer, as repeated in the tract but denied by "Adelphos," is, not that we are come to the blood of sprinkling (true and precious and indispensable as this is); not that we must not be led into other and further truth in Christ (which is what his argument here assuredly sets aside), but just the contrary — that we need and have more in our blessed Lord and His infinite work; that, besides His blood, "so many of us as were baptized into him, baptized into his death," and thus, like as He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. He that died (this is the point) is justified from *sin*. The question of the remission of our sins we have had already fully settled in Romans 3 - 5: 11.

I grant indeed that death with Christ "Adelphos" and his companions never seem to comprehend. This lies at the root of much of their bitter hostility. They set themselves to decry a revealed truth, which they themselves do not appreciate. This, in the words of "Adelphos," I should call truly "rash," and "most offensive;" and I have good reason to know that the same spirit and similar opposition, even to a principle so elementary and of the deepest moment for practical walk, pervade the party and their doctrine. Is it sound? Does it promote holiness? Is such a course really of God? Are they too stiff to learn?

Again, he asks, "Is the blood of the Son of man to be no longer 'drink indeed' to believers after they are brought to God?" I answer, most assuredly; it is the sweetest food of faith. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood, we dwell in Him and He in us. If "Adelphos" is an older man than the young brother he rebukes, he is so much the less excusable for putting such a question, which is equally misleading in what it suppresses and in what it suggests. For he might, not to say must, know that those he assails love to show forth and dwell on the death of the Lord. For my own part, much as I delight in the power of His resurrection, and in His heavenly glory, my heart ever turns, not to our union with Him, but to His death, in which all the moral being of God was glorified, even in respect and in spite of sin, as it was and could be nowhere else, through the grace of the Lord Jesus. This joy of entrance into His dying abides ever here, as I believe it will be not less but perfectly known in heaven.

Hence we see that, as the passover is really deeper morally than the Red Sea as a type, so Romans 5: 1-11 goes beyond Romans 8 in this that the former is more simple and absolute in its presentations of sovereign grace and God Himself, while the latter is no doubt richer in its display of what we are in Christ, and of what Christ is in us by the Spirit of God, closing triumphantly with God for us, rather than setting Him as the object before us in whom we exult. The note ignores the beautiful consistency of scripture, arrays one truth in which we all agree against another, which is all-important in its own divinely ordered place. This the tract sought to state simply, and thus supply a most evident lack, which the resistance and the party spirit of its censor unwittingly confess and only confirm. But where is Christ's glory, where the guidance of the Spirit, in such tactics?

But "Adelphos" is as mistaken in his use of scripture as we have seen him unconscionably censorious. For I must ask in my turn, Is drinking the Son of man's blood laid down in scripture as the principle of a believer's walk and watch against the sin that is in him breaking out in his ways? Or is it not, as I have shown, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" Under the pretence of guarding the value of Christ's blood, it is really an effort to undermine another truth of God, bound up with Christ dead and risen, of which he has yet to learn the power.

Finally, 1 John 1: 7 is not "the exact contradiction" of the statement as to Romans 6, nor does it touch the question. "Adelphos" reasons from the Authorized Version, which may be correct enough for ordinary use. But it is as bad scholarship as it is bad doctrine to apply it to ridding the believer from indwelling sin, or giving him practical power against it. The true force is, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from *every** sin" (ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας).† No unbiassed scholar who weighs the passage will deny this; as no person open to the bearing of truth will deny that the truth here laid down connects itself with Romans 5 and the passover, rather than with Romans 6 and the Red Sea.

There is this brand on the assailing brethren that they have all condemned in strong terms, and separated themselves for years, from that laxity in ecclesiastical walk, which they would now excuse if not commend; and that they in general yielded to the pressure of old friends what they once (as we thought with godly sincerity) believed to be a question of Christ. Can any dispassionate doubt what was the true source and nature of the change? Perhaps "Adelphos" too has not forgotten one in particular

whose lack of singleness of purpose exposed him to go out and come in over and over again? I have no wish to wound needlessly; but was it too much to hope that one so infirm of purpose might learn both to distrust himself and to watch against that censoriousness which is ever suspecting evil in what is not understood? Take for instance, the repetition in this tract of the outcry about "smiting," the Lord's death, atonement and life in resurrection. Do not think that I am going to refute what always seemed to me to carry along with it its own refutation. It is a melancholy witness how far the heated feelings of retrograde hearts can fling out charges which their authors possibly believe themselves, and a very few followers who believe what they believe. I could wish them all a happier lot than the detective line of things to which they have addicted themselves. The Lord alone can give that subjection to His word in a sense of His grace which can so far keep us right.

Your servant in the Lord, W. K.

* So I believe it is rendered in the recent and exact version of Mr. T. Sheldon Green, who will scarcely be charged with "Exclusive" proclivities. The only wonder is that any scholar should have taken the passage otherwise.

† If I understand the use made of Acts 20: 7 in pp. 23, 24, "Adelphos" seems rather short in textual criticism; for no one acquainted with the comparative value of the witnesses ventures to prefer τῶν μαθητῶν το ἡμῶν.

(B.T. Vol. 8, p. 130.)

If I trust to my own strength in the hour of temptation, I break down: but if I have learnt, through grace, to cast myself on Christ, I find all in Him to help me, and to go through the temptation unscathed. I must learn the lesson. If I learn it with the Lord, I am spared the sifting but if not, I must be sifted. If not in intercourse with the Lord, it must be with Satan. "Nevertheless," saith the Lord, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." It is blessed to believe that God loves us, notwithstanding all our failure. It is worth (not any sin but) any sorrow to learn this.