

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

WHAT IS PLYMOUTHISM? III.

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THE DOCTRINAL HERESIES OF PLYMOUTHISM.

It has been well said by a certain writer that "A half truth is a whole lie." Truth is like the human face in this respect, that to preserve its beauty every feature must be in its own place and every feature must have its due proportion. It would not be the "face divine" created by God, but the face of a horrible monster, were the eyes put where the mouth is and the mouth where the eyes are. Though not so horrible as displacements, yet even distortions of the features destroy the face, as we feel at once when we look on a face where the mouth is too large and the eyes too small, or where the nose fills the whole face. "Concave mirrors," says Dr. Guthrie, "magnify the features nearest to them unto undue and monstrous proportions; and in common mirrors that are ill cast, and of uneven surface, the most beautiful face is distorted unto deformity."

It is even so with Plymouth teaching. It displaces and distorts, it discolors and disturbs, it exaggerates or diminishes almost every doctrine it touches in its partial and narrow theology.

It is not my intention, in these letters (which I wish to shorten as much as possible) to state all the heresies that appear in the teachings of Mr. Darby and his followers. There is no time or occasion at present to refer to their errors in regard (1) to their denial of the true humanity of Christ; (2) to their denial of Christ's righteousness being imputed to his people, and their assertion that even on the cross it was only during three hours that his sufferings were of an atoning character; (3) to their pre-millennialism and the secret rapture of the saints. Passing by these and other errors, which do not at present concern us much in this country, I will touch only the more common teachings of Plymouthism.

1. Making faith and assurance inseparable things.

To be safe and to know that you are safe are not (neither in thought nor experience) the same thing. A man may be safe and yet he may not know it; and he may think he is not safe at all. Again and again we find in the Gospels the fact that Christ's disciples were safe when they themselves did not think they were safe. They were safe, and yet they were doubting it when Christ addressed them in words like these: "Let not your heart be troubled." "Fear not little flock." "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" And at the same time, the Pharisees felt sure they were safe when they were very far from being safe, so that John said to them, "Think not to say within yourselves we have Abraham for our father." It is one thing to believe on Christ, and it is another thing (though the two should be sought together, and are generally conjoined in the experience of true Christians,) to be assured beyond any doubt at all that you are resting on Christ. But these two things Plymouthists always confound. "Only believe that Christ died for you and you are saved." That is, believe that you are saved and you are saved. This is the burden of their teaching. It is the theology of the ostrich, which, pursued by its enemies, buries its head in the sand and believes because it surrounds itself with darkness and thinks it is safe that it is safe. But does that make it safe? That theology which confounds faith with assurance is not the theology of Christ. The point of importance with him is not that you have a large, well furnished house over your head, and that you go through its rooms singing, "I am saved," but the point is, what kind of foundation is under that house. Is it the sand or is it the rock? That theology is not the theology of John, who never says "we know we are saved because we believe we are saved," but we know we are saved "because we love the brethren," "because we keep his commandments," "because of the spirit that he has given us." In other words, according to John, the believer's assurance is not a direct act of mind like faith, but an indirect act based on evidence. It is not a direct perception, but an inference from a perception. That theology is not the theology of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, which says that assurance flows from justification, adoption and sanctification. Nor is it the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which surely is

of greater weight than Mr. Darby, and which says, "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it; yet being enabled by the Spirit to know the things that are freely given him of God, he may without extraordinary revelation in the right use of ordinary means attain thereto. And therefore it is the duty of every one to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance."

II Their false doctrine of prayer

They teach that an unconverted man has no warrant to pray. Some go so far as to say that it is useless to pray, to read the Scriptures, to attend the means of grace while one is in an unconverted state. Others without venturing that far have been heard to say, "While I do not forbid you to pray I certainly do not advise it." In answer to this false and extremely dangerous view let us read what is said about Manasseh, the most heinous of sinners. "And when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him and heard his supplication." 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. But some will say this was under the Old Testament and is no rule for us. Let us then turn to a case of wickedness fully as bad, that occurred under the New Testament. To Simon Magus while in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity, Peter, (who was evidently here no Plymouthist), gave the advice "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Acts viii. 22, 23. It is true that the unconverted ought to be warned against resting in prayer as an end against making it a saviour, a ground of acceptance with God; but they should be encouraged to use it as a means to finding Christ. "Promise me, promise me," Dr. Duncan, of Edinburgh, was once heard saying to an aged woman whom he met on the street, "promise me that you will seek Christ. Seeking cannot save you, but seeking you shall find Him, and finding Him, He will save you." That is the proper use of prayer to the unconverted.

"And end ignoble a means divine."

Plymouthists teach that it is not lawful for believers to pray for the forgiveness of sin. They teach that the believer's sins, past, present and future, were pardoned 1,800 years ago; and that at each renewed transgression he has only to believe that it is so, that his sins have been forgiven long ago, to enjoy anew the peace of forgiveness. The believer may confess it if he chooses, but he is not to pray for pardon, and even confession is not necessary. The believer was saved 1,800 years ago, all his sin was buried with Christ; he need not confess it, nor seek forgiveness, but just believe that it is all right between him and God. In accordance with these views such hymns as "Just as I am" have been changed after this fashion.

AUTHOR'S VERSION.

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God I come.

BRETHREN'S VERSION.

Just as I WAS, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God I CAME.

The Brethren in this dangerous position of theirs confound atonement with pardon, and then make the whole of salvation consist in pardon. We are justified once for all; but forgiveness is needed every day. Atonement is not forgiveness, and the sins of the saints may be forgiven as far as eternal consequences are concerned, while they may not be forgiven as far as concerns temporal chastisement. What say the Scriptures? "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth (not has cleansed but is now cleansing) us from all sin:" 1 John i. 7, 8. "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father." Chap. ii. verse 2. But the words of the Lord's prayer settle the matter to all sensible and gracious ones. "Forgive us our trespasses" is a prayer for every day as is daily bread. And with this agrees the experience of God's people. Leigh Richmond says in dying, "It is only by coming to Christ as a little child, and as for the first time, that I can get peace." Dr. Boyne, in dying, said, "I am looking to that compassionate Saviour whose blood

cleanseth from all sin." The Rev. Mr. Sandeman was asked when dying if he had any pain, to which he replied, "Since I knew Christ I have felt no pain but sin." The Rev. John Duncan said when dying, "Pray for me, pray for pardon, and pray for purity for I am still in the body." And who, save Brethren, would not subscribe to these utterances as both natural and well grounded.*

Plymouthists teach that it is not lawful to pray for the Holy Spirit because he abides with all true Christians, and they have no need to ask for what they have already. The mistake here on their part consists (as Miss E. J. Whately on *Plymouth Brethren* has well shown) in confounding the person with his influence. The Holy Spirit (always with the definite article), the third person, is ever with his people. "He abides with them forever." But the influence exerted by the spirit, "Holy Spirit" (without the article) is variable. At times it is withholden and the divine life droops, then it is given and the divine life flourishes. We read, therefore, to ask, seek, knock, for this sweet influence.

The Plymouth views of prayer on these points run counter to the views and experience of all evangelical churches, and are extremely hurtful to piety where they prevail. Closet prayer ceases, the family altar falls into decay. Where these views prevail people will be heard to say, "I don't need to pray, nor attend church, nor go to sacrament, I am saved. It was all finished long ago." In a certain town, which will be here nameless, before Plymouthism came in there was a family remarkable for its good order and punctuality in family worship. It used to be the home of a well known minister of the Presbyterian Church, when he always joined the family at their morning and evening worship. The family adopted Plymouth views, and when he next visited them he never saw the Bible opened for family worship, nor was he asked to lead the family devotion, as formerly, nor open his lips in prayer in that blighted home.

CALVINISM IN THE BIBLE.

The Bible teaches Calvinism, and hence we are bound to receive it whether "horrible" or not: for if the Bible be the Word of God we are bound to believe every doctrine it teaches, and every syllable it contains, for every word it contains was dictated by the Holy Spirit, and hence every word contains an important meaning. Whenever then he used the word predestinate, he intended to convey the idea contained in that word. We are not at liberty to receive a portion of the Bible, and reject the rest. It stands or falls together, for it all rests upon the same foundation, so that we must receive all, or we must reject all.

The great difficulty with many persons is, that they take their theology to the Bible instead of drawing it from the Bible. They imbibe a certain belief, and then they turn to the Bible determined to find it taught there, and they generally succeed, for by wresting the words of Scripture, and taking an isolated passage here and there at random, you can make the Bible teach any thing you please. But no one has a right so to abuse God's word. Every passage must be interpreted in the light of its context, and must be taken in its obvious meaning.

Many persons imbibe a prejudice against a certain doctrine, and they go to the Bible determined not to find it there, and so they, too, generally succeed, for every one knows that it is next to impossible to convince a prejudiced mind; and so, I apprehend that such is the difficulty in the way of many, with the doctrine of predestination. It is certainly profoundly mysterious, and because men cannot comprehend it they refuse to receive it, forgetting that they are surrounded by mysteries on every hand, which they are bound to accept. But because they are not able to explain this doctrine, they become prejudiced against it, and so they turn to the Bible determined not to find it there. Dr. Chas. Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology*, lays down a principle of great importance, very applicable in this discussion. He says:

"It must be remembered that theology is not philosophy. It does not assume to discover truth, or to reconcile what it teaches as true, with all other truth. Its province is simply to state what God has revealed in His word."

Let us apply this principle to the subject now under consideration, and approach the Word of God, not in the spirit of dictation, but with the spirit of humble

*Plymouth Brethrenism by Rev. W. Reid.