

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

A CATECHISM ON THE DOCTRINES OF THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN.

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Q. Who are the Plymouth Brethren?

A. A modern sect of Christians, variously known as Plymouth Brethren, Brethren, or Darbyites. They arose about forty years ago in Plymouth.

Q. What are their views?

A. They hold peculiar views upon Faith, Repentance, Justification, Sanctification, the Sabbath, the Church, the Ministry, the Moral Law, Prayer, and the Holy Spirit. They are also Anabaptists and Millenarians.

THE MORAL LAW

Q. What are their views concerning the Moral Law?

A. That the Moral Law is not a rule of life to believers under the Christian dispensation (many hold that it is still binding on unbelievers); that the believer is not bound to obey it, for he is now under the new and higher law of love, as "love is the fulfilling of the law."

Q. What answer do you make to these assertions?

A. 1. Love was always the fulfilling of the law, even in Old Testament times; for was not the sum of the Ten Commandments love? (Mat. xxii. 40). 2. Love is not a new commandment at all. (1 John ii. 7.) 3. In Romans xiii. 8, 9, quoted by the Brethren, believers are exhorted to love one another on the ground of its being a requirement of the Moral Law. 4. The words "Love is the fulfilling of the law" do not prove the law obsolete; they mean—Love is the principle or spring of our obedience. It enables us to obey the law. The mode of its manifestation is the subject of positive prescription. Love cannot be the rule of obedience; it can be the spring or motive of it. This is to confound the railway track with the steam power which drives the train. Love is the steam-power and not the track. The Moral Law is the track and not the steam-power. Love does not tell me what to do; it tells me how to do it. Love is a motive, not a rule. Love goes to the law to learn the Divine will. The law of love, therefore, includes the Moral Law. (Romans xiii. 8, 9.)

Q. But are we not under the law of liberty, which is not surely the law of Moses—“So speak ye and so do, as they that will be judged by the law of liberty?” (James i. 12.)

A. This law, too, includes the law of Moses, for James says—“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scriptures, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,’ ye do well.” Now this law is not obsolete, for we are commanded to obey it; yet it is part of the law of Moses. (Lev. xix. 18.) Again “He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” Now, no man can be a transgressor of an obsolete law. This, too, was said to *believers*. James quotes two passages from the law of Moses—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” and “Thou shalt not have respect of persons.” To illustrate the law of liberty. Therefore, the royal law and the law of liberty are one and the same law, or, rather, the royal law remains in the Gospel.

Q. But Paul says: “Ye are not under law, but under grace?” (Rom vi. 14.)

A. This has nothing to say to the law as a rule of life. Else why should Roman Christians (Rom. xiii. 8, 9.) and Ephesian Christians (Eph. vi. 1-3) and Christians in general (James ii.) be referred to the law itself as a rule of life and conduct? Law and grace are antithetical in the passage. If the law here means merely a rule, then grace is a rule too; and Paul must mean in that case—“Ye are not under law as a rule, but under grace as a rule.” But grace can be no rule—it is a force, a power. Besides, it makes Paul argue lamely—“Sin shall have no dominion over you; for grace is your rule. The passage means: “Ye are not under the law as a condition of salvation, but under a system of free justification; and “Ye are not under the law stirring up sin, but under grace sanctifying and healing.”

Q. But Paul says you cannot have two husbands at the same time (Rom. vii. 1-5), and Christ being now your husband you are dead to the law?

A. 1. Paul cannot regard the law as altogether obsolete, for he says (v. 25)—“With the mind I myself serve the law of God.” He cannot contradict himself. 2. He holds that the believer is dead to the law as a way of life. He does not say the law itself is dead: it is unchanged; but our relation to it is altered. 3. He is not here speaking of the law as a rule, but of life itself—which we have by Christ and not by the law, and which leads to good works. (v. 4.) 4. If we are under Christ, we are under the law as a rule, for the law of Christ includes the Moral Law. (Matt. v. 17.) We are liberated from the law that we may be able to keep the law. We get the “no condemnation” in order that “the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us.” (Rom. viii. 4.) 5. This very chapter (vii.) is intended to show the use and effect of the law in the case of converted men.

Q. But Paul never makes the distinction of modern divines between the law as a way of justification and as a rule of life. The law can do nothing but curse. If, then, a believer is put under it, he is put under the curse.

A. The law can do something else than curse. Paul could serve it—(Rom. vii. 25)—and delight in it. (v. 22.) What rule had David and the Old Testament saints? The law. (Psalm cxix.) Therefore the law can do something else than curse. It can be a guide as well as a condemner. The Lord said in Old Testament times—(Jer. xxxi. 31.)—“I will put my laws into their mind,” referring to Christian times. (Heb. viii. 10) Were these laws to curse? Christ has “redeemed us from the curse of the law,” but not from the law itself as a guide.

Q. But Paul says: “The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient?” (1 Tim. i. 9.)

A. This proves (1) that Christ did not absolutely abrogate the Decalogue, for it remains to condemn the lawless: “it is good if a man use it lawfully.” (v. 8.) 2. This proves

that it is to be used. 3. Paul is speaking here of the relation the law bears to the lawless; and what is that? a state of condemnation. In that sense it was not made for the righteous. 4. Paul is here incensed at Jewish teachers for making the law necessary to salvation. Therefore, he is not speaking of the law here as a mere rule of life.

Q. But the law was made for the Jews, and not for us Gentiles?

A. How is it, then, that Paul enforces the duties of the Decalogue on Gentiles? (Rom. xiii. 8, 9.) Is it not the fact that Paul regards Jew and Gentile as one people? (1 Cor. x.) The Gentiles are said to be Abraham's seed. (Gal. iii. 29.)

Q. But the Ten Commandments are an imperfection of disobedience—they are negative, and Gospel duties have no place in them?

A. Our Lord recognized their perfection in His answer to the question of the lawyer, “Which is the great commandment of the law?” He expounded them in his Sermon on the Mount, and freed them from the false glosses of the Scribes. —2. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not enjoined in them *formally*, neither are they enjoined in the commandment of Christ “Love one another.” But the question is, whether the Decalogue, as interpreted by Christ, does not require the observance of *all* Gospel duties. All such have their origin in love, and this is the sum of the Decalogue. 3. Even if it were imperfect, it does not follow that it is not binding as far as it goes. 4. Christ never enjoined a greater love than the law. He did not originate one iota of his law: He borrowed it professedly from the Old Testament. Besides, it was the only revealed and written law he had himself. (Psalm xl. 8.) Our new relationship to the law is that of Christ himself to it, and our feelings to it ought to be the same: “Thy law is within my heart.” Surely the believer is not greater than his Lord.

Q. But it could never teach me to love my enemies?

A. It does not say that it is right to kill your enemy any more than your friend. “Love your enemies” is no new commandment. Christ liberates the word “neighbour” from its narrow Jewish sense in Matthew, v. 43. It includes enemies as well as friends.

Q. But I hate Christ, not the law?

A. But Christ's life was one great law-fulfilling; and he said—“Thy law is within my heart.” (Psalm xl. 8.) Christ is a living model, but that does not supersede the law. If Christ be the end of the law, how is he contrary to it? If Christ and the law could dwell together under the Old Testament, why not under the New?

Q. But the law cannot work grace?

A. Neither can the Gospel itself. It is unfair to take the law *without* the Spirit, and the Gospel *with* the Spirit, and then contrast them.

Q. But the law was written on tables of stone; the Gospel on fleshy tables of the heart?

A. No. To make the analogy fair, the Gospel is written on paper. Surely when David delighted in the law, it was written on the fleshy tables of his heart. (See Prov. iii. 3: Jer. xvii. 1.)

Q. But “the law and the prophets were until John?” (Luke xvi. 16.) The law was to end when John came.

A. 1. But according to your principles, it could not end for three years after—viz., till the death of Christ. 2. See Matthew xi. 13, where the meaning is clearer—“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John;” showing it to be the typical part of the law. 3. The law means the dispensation of Moses, as Paul often takes it. (Heb.)

Q. But the law is the ministration of death? (2 Cor. iii. 7.)

A. 1. You are here to take the law *nakedly without* the Spirit, and the Gospel *with* the Spirit; for the Gospel without the Spirit would be a ministration of death, too—“the savour of death.” 2. He is not speaking here of the moral law specifically, but of the whole dispensation of the Jews.

Q. What positive evidence can you give me that the Moral Law is still binding on believers as a rule of life?

A. Christ says “He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.” (Mat. v. 17.) He refers here to the *Moral* precepts of the law, for he speaks of “good works” in v. 16, and illustrates the Commandments in subsequent verses. He foresees the Antinomianism of future times in v. 19; and speaks in v. 20 of a righteousness which *includes* the Ten Commandments for he would not have told them in the same breath to keep them, and then commanded a higher law which *excluded* them. It is strange that his first and longest sermon was to vindicate the law.

Q. But the Kingdom of Heaven was not yet set up, and this sermon does not apply to the Gospel Dispensation?

A. Christ speaks here of the Gospel Dispensation, for he says—“He shall be least in the kingdom of heaven.” (v. 19.) Surely the closing words of the sermon—“Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect,”—are applicable to the highest spirituality of the gospel state.

Q. But Christ fulfilled the law, and our legal oneness with him exempts us from all further obedience to it?

A. If so, then we are exempted from all obedience whatsoever to the commands of Christ himself, and of Paul, as well as to those of the Decalogue. But Christ's obedience to law does not exempt us from personal obedience to it, any more than his sufferings and death exempt us from a personal death, or suffering for his sake. We do not suffer and die as he did to satisfy divine justice, so neither do we yield obedience to the law in order to obtain eternal life by it.

Q. What other passage do you refer to?

A. Paul says: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law.” (Rom. iii. 31.) We set it on a firmer basis than ever. It is now for us, not against us. This is the Moral Law, as the Brethren admit. Now, if the law ceases to be binding as a rule on believers, then Christ did come to destroy its authority over them, and faith does make it void.

Q. But Christ established the law by fulfilling it, and through our legal oneness with him we are no longer called to fulfil it?

A. 1. You are not called to fulfil it for your justification; but Paul says, notwithstanding, that he served this very law of God after his conversion. (Romans vii. 25.) 2. Christ's obedience to law for you does not stand as an equivalent to the sum of your whole Christian obedience after conversion.

(See the answer before the last.) 3. You still argue on the false supposition that the law can do nothing but curse.

Q. What other evidence is there on the point?

A. Paul says:—“Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ”—(1 Cor. ix. 21)—implying that there is no alternative between being under the law to Christ and being without law altogether. It was not an altered law, but the same law put upon a new footing.

Q. But “under the law to Christ” ought to be translated “duly subject to Christ?”

A. It ought not. The word *ennomos* means within the boundaries of the law, as where it is said, “If it be determined in a lawful assembly”—that is, convened according to the law (Acts xiii. 39.) If the Greek word *ennomos* is to be translated “without law to God,” and not “wicked,” as it sometimes is, then the antithesis requires that *ennomos* should be “under or within the law to Christ.” I need not quote other passages in proof of my position. I conclude by referring to only one more—James ii. 9—where “respecters of persons” (and they are addressed as believers) are said to “become transgressors of the law.” The truth is, then, that we must either keep the law or break it: there is no alternative. Brethren say they do the will of God, but not the law of God; and how do they know the will of God but by his law? The sum of the Decalogue is love. If you do not love, are you sinning? Does your being not under the law, but under grace, make the want of love no crime?

THE MINISTRY.

Q. What are the Brethren's objections to Ministry?

A. They hold that we put a man in the place of the Holy Ghost by appointing a minister over us, and that their meetings are held under the presidency of the Holy Ghost. They speak of ours as the “one-man ministry.” They deny the right of a separate class in the Church called elders, or ministers, or bishops, to preach and rule and exercise discipline.

Q. They hold, then, that all Christians have the right of ministry?

A. Yes though Paul asks—“Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?” (1 Cor. xii. 29.)

Q. What say the Scriptures?

A. If the Scriptures recognize no stated ministry, why should Paul give such minute directions as to bishops, evangelists, and deacons—officers in the Apostolic Church—who, according to the Brethren, were to pass away immediately? Surely there was a distinction at one time between teachers and taught, rulers and ruled, ministers and people? else why should Paul command Christians “to remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken to them the Word of God?” (Heb. xiii. 7, 17; 1 Thess. v. 12; 1 Tim. v. 17.) Why should a separate class be called elders, bishops, stars, angels, stewards, ambassadors, unless there was a separate class? Where does Paul tell us that the ministry was to pass away—that this separate class was to cease? Will the brethren tell us at what precise period this took place? They are bound to do so. Can they prove that the gifts of ministry referred to in Romans xii. 4, 8, and 1 Peter iv. 10, 11, do not refer to the Church in its continuance? Did not our Lord say to an order of teachers that he would be with them to the end of the world? Why, too, should he be called the Chief Shepherd, unless there were to be under shepherds? And how long is he to be Chief Shepherd? (1 Peter v. 4.)

Q. But Ministers now-a-days are not appointed by the Holy Ghost like the elders of the apostles' days; for they were either appointed by the apostles, or by those deputed by them?

A. 1. The apostles had no other guidance of the Holy Ghost in these appointments—if they alone did appoint them—than the Church now has; else, why should they have appointed Demas? Philip baptised Simon Magus, an unconverted man; and Peter committed mistakes in his public ministry. (Gal. ii. 11.) 2. If the Holy Ghost was to appoint elders in Ephesus and Crete through Timothy and Titus, why should Paul have so carefully sketched the qualifications of elders or bishops in his epistles to them? This was quite unnecessary, on Plymouth principles. Was it not because they were both uninspired men? 3. The apostles did not appoint alone. Even an apostle could not be chosen *without the Church*. (Acts i.) The people in this case appointed two persons, *antecedently* to God's choice.

Q. But the ultimate choice of an apostle rested with God?

A. He selected one of the two; but, to confirm the liberty of the Church, Matthias was afterwards, as the Greek word means, “reckoned by common suffrage among the apostles.”

Q. But Matthias was chosen Jewishly by lot, and before the Holy Ghost was sent down; Peter had no authority for what he did. He showed his usual rashness.

A. Then it follows, of course, that Matthias was no apostle; that the apostles and disciples were all in the wrong; that though they prayed to God to say which of the two he had chosen, they were wrong in supposing that they obtained the divine sanction. Are we to be told that the apostles acted here contrary to the word and will of God? This is the Plymouth position.

Q. But we are told in Acts xiv. 23 that the apostles “ordained them elders in every church;” hence they were appointments of the Holy Ghost, unlike your modern appointments?

A. The Greek phrase is—“They ordained them elders by election.” Besides, this passage proves that in every church there are to be elders—rather unlike the Brethren, who run from church to church over the whole kingdom. Now, if elders were necessary while the apostles were still alive, surely they ought to be much more necessary now; and why were elders appointed at Antioch and other places, when the churches had been established there long before?

Q. But Timothy and Titus appointed elders without the election of the people?

A. How do you know? Why should they do differently in Ephesus and Crete from Paul and Barnabas in Acts xiv. 23?

Q. But the elders were not teachers—they were mere rulers. (1 Tim. v. 17.)