

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

A CATECHISM ON THE DOCTRINES OF THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN.

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(Continued.)

Q. But does not the Scripture say—"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord?"

A. Yes; and everything else he does. Even "the ploughing of the wicked" is sin. But no one would say, he ought not to plough, or to read the Scriptures. Again the wicked should not eat or drink, any more than pray, for they are required—(1 Cor. x. 31)—to do these to the glory of God; but this they cannot do.

Q. What, then, is the meaning of the Brethren's statement?

A. They say a sinner should not pray for salvation, but take it without praying, as if the things were inconsistent. What is the difference between "praying for" and "taking" salvation? Is it possible to take salvation without expressing a desire for it? And is not prayer oftentimes the first utterance of faith? Our Lord, in talking with the Samaritan woman, says—"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." (John iv. 10.) And did not Peter tell the unregenerate Simon Magus to "repent of his wickedness and pray God, if, perhaps, the thought of his heart might be forgiven him." (Acts viii. 22.) Were not the dying thief and the publican under a law-work when they prayed? Was it not after the prayer that they were justified? See also, Isaiah lv. 6, 7—"Call ye upon him while he is near." If a man is not to pray till he has faith how is he to know when to begin to pray? Is a man's faith always so strong and so tangible that he can be conscious of it before he has used it, and thus sure that he will not be committing sin if he prays? But if a sinner take salvation before he prays, and does so because he has no faith to pray, then he is saved before he has faith, and is of course not justified by faith. The Brethren counsel the sinner against praying, because prayer implies faith, and yet exhort him to take salvation, which is impossible without faith. According to Plymouth principles, a sinner can never either believe or pray. The matter simply stands thus:—Is the sinner, prior to the exercise of a saving faith, in a regenerate or unregenerate state? If regenerated, then faith cannot have been the instrument of his salvation. If unregenerate, how is it that the faith of an unregenerate man can be acceptable to God when nothing else can be?

Q. But you put prayer in the place of believing? For nothing can ever come before believing?

A. The word of God puts itself before believing, and represents itself as a means of conversion: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God." (1 Peter, i. 23.) Yet it does not follow that a man is to believe before he reads the Scriptures, though he is said to be "begotten by the Word." The Scriptures do not exclude the intervention of means in regeneration.

REPENTANCE.

Q. What is their doctrine concerning repentance?

A. It has no place whatever in their preaching, except when they warn sinners in this way: "You need not repent; it is not necessary—only come to Christ—repentance hinders the sinner from coming to Christ." One calls it trash, legalism, and salvation by works. This is surely unlike the apostles' style: "Repent and believe the Gospel." Peter ought not to have told the sorcerer to repent of his wickedness.

Q. Are these statements not opposed to Scripture?

A. They are. Repentance in Scripture, so far from being a hindrance to coming, is the actual way of a sinner coming to Christ; whether it be that the sinner "come trembling," "come weeping," or "wept bitterly," or "came to himself."—Christ never said, "Come to me, you that don't care about your sins," or "Don't repent till you come; but he does say, "Except ye repent ye shall perish." We never read in Scripture of an impenitent believer or a penitent unbeliever.

Q. What, then, is the relation of faith to repentance?

A. They cannot be separated. Repentance is the tear-drop in the eye of faith. (Joel ii. 12.) In the order of nature, faith must be first; but in the order of time they spring up together.

Q. Do you bring a saved heart to Christ?

A. No, indeed. The jailor, the dying thief, the prodigal, the publican, Mary Magdalene, did not bring a saved, but penitent, heart to Christ. Their repentance was the way of their coming, and was therefore no barrier in the way. Not one of them all, nor of the three thousand pricked to the heart, ever said, "I'll not leave off my sins till I know I am pardoned."

Q. What, then, do the Brethren make of repentance?

A. It is with them a mere change of mind in regard to God and the Gospel. "You once thought," they say, "that God is angry with you: that is a mistake; he loves you just as you are, sins and all. Believe this, and it will change your mind towards God." This is repentance. Yet it is certainly something more than this. The Brethren make repentance and faith virtually one and the same thing, for surely faith, too, is a change of mind. The 51st Psalm indicates something more; and Paul had no idea of a repentance without sorrow when he wrote (2 Cor. vii. 9, 10) concerning a godly sorrow and repentance not to be repented of. There is no repentance for sin in the Brethren's theology; there is a change of mind in regard to God, and nothing more. Some make repentance to be regeneration.

Q. But do the Brethren really hold that believers ought not to confess their sins or pray for pardon?

A. They do, on the ground that they have no sins to confess, for these have been put away eighteen hundred years ago! Consequently, they will not repeat the Lord's Prayer,

which has come to a poor pass; for, according to the Brethren, no unconverted man can say it, as he cannot call God his Father; and no converted man, as he has no trespass to be forgiven! Who, then, are to use it? But if we are not to mourn for sin committed, because it is pardoned, why should we be adverse to committing sin, since it is pardoned before it is committed? How, too, is it that Paul, a converted man, calls himself the "chief of sinners?" What does John mean when he says—"If a man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask for him." (1 John v. 16.) Why should it be right to ask for a sinning brother, and not for our sinning selves?

Q. Do the Scriptures countenance this view?

A. No; John says—"If we confess our sins"—speaking of believers—"he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," (1 John v. 16.) Was David not a converted man when he penned the 51st Psalm! Yet it is full of confession.

JUSTIFICATION.

Q. What is the Brethren's doctrine on this subject?

A. They hold that believers are justified from eternity, or from the time of Christ's death, and that faith has nothing more to do with our justification than merely to bring the fact of it to our knowledge. They deny the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is the ground of our justification; and though they hold that Christ suffered in our stead, they deny that he obeyed the law in our stead.

Q. What do you say upon this subject?

A. With regard to the imputation of Christ's righteousness, it is clearly taught in Rom. v. 17, 18; iii. 22; Phil. iii. 8, 9; 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 21; Jer. xxiii. 6. And if Christ did not fulfil the law for us, what does Paul mean by saying—"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (Christ) shall many be made righteous." (Rom. v. 19.) This was not obedience to suffering, but to law, for it stands in opposition to the "disobedience of Adam," which had relation only to law. What, again, does Paul mean by "the righteousness of one" (v. 18.)? It cannot be obedience to suffering. Christ himself explained it when he said he must "fulfill all righteousness." (Matt. iii. 15.) Paul says the object of Christ's coming was that "the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us"—(Rom. viii. 4)—i.e., which the law required of us—the duties of obedience. Christ, too, was "made under the law" for us—i.e., as Paul explains—(Gal. iv. 21)—not under its curse, but its obligation to obedience. Why, indeed, should a sinless man be put under the law at all, unless he stood for us? If he did not obey the law in our stead, he might have come directly from heaven to the cross of Calvary, and not lived so many years upon earth.

Q. What do you say concerning sinners being justified from eternity or from the time of Christ's death?

A. The Brethren speak of our sins as being "put away," "laid upon Jesus," "borne away," "atoned for," as if the sins of all believers—past, present, and future—were actually forgiven when Christ died. They will not use the Lord's Prayer, because they have no "trespasses to be forgiven;" they were forgiven eighteen hundred years ago on the cross. 1. They err by confounding atonement with pardon, for atonement is not pardon, but supplies the ground or reason of forgiveness. 2. If the sins of a believer were actually pardoned before he was born, in what sense can such an individual ever have been guilty? 3. Besides if he was actually forgiven before he believed, how is faith at all necessary to his salvation? 4. But let us ask, whose sins were actually pardoned when Christ died? Those of believers, or those of all mankind? If those of all mankind, then all are actually saved. 5. According to this doctrine, a murderer whom God pardons has not broken the sixth commandment. Peter committed no sin in denying his Lord, and Paul in persecuting the saints. Those who hold that the believer is justified from eternity must hold that God was not displeased with Abraham's idolatry before his conversion, or with Manasseh's bloody doings, for their sins were pardoned before they were born; neither was David guilty of murder and adultery, nor was Nathan justified in rebuking the King. 6. A man is not justified till he believes, for Paul says—(Acts xiii. 39)—"By him all that believe are justified from all things." 7. We cannot be justified before we believe, for we are damned before we believe—"He that believeth not is condemned already." (John iii. 18.) Paul says of certain Corinthians,—"Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified." (1 Cor. vi. 9.) This implies that at one time they were not justified." 8. Paul says—"Those whom he called, them he also justified." The calling always precedes the justification. 9. This doctrine involves the absurdity that a man can be born again before he is born at all. 10. It involves, too, the following conclusion—that, as all sin is put away by Christ there can be nothing at any time against any sinner in the Book of God.

SANCTIFICATION.

Q. What is imputed sanctification?

A. It is the doctrine of the Brethren that we are sanctified as well as justified in Christ; that all believers are sanctified in him in a sense that excludes all personal and progressive sanctification; that they are perfectly holy the moment they believe, and they never become more holy.

Q. What do you think of the doctrine?

A. It is sheer absurdity to talk of imputed sanctification. You cannot speak even of imputed justification. You can of imputed righteousness. Justification is not imputed—it is conferred.

Q. But Paul says—"Christ is made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption?" (1 Cor. i. 20.)

A. He does not say that sanctification is by imputation. You could as readily prove imputed wisdom and imputed redemption. According to this logic, our redemption, which includes our glorification, is as complete now as our justification.

Q. But does not Paul say—"By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified?" (Heb. x. 14.)

A. I answer—1. He does not say that Christ perfected their sanctification. He makes a clear distinction between

the "perfecting" and the "sanctification." 2. He is not here speaking of perfecting them in holiness at all. He says the Jewish sacrifices offered year by year "could not make the comers thereunto perfect"—in what sense? In the sense of taking away their sins, and thus having no more conscience for sin. Therefore, the "one offering" of Christ made them perfect in this sense, and in this sense alone. 3. The word "sanctified" always means in Hebrew not "made holy" but "dedicated or consecrated to God" by Christ's offering of himself. (Heb. xx. 13; x. 10, 14, 29; xiii. 12.) Therefore, there is no ground in this passage for your idea of imputed sanctification.

Q. How do they fall into this error?

A. They use the word sanctification in its Old Testament sense of consecration, and declare that men are perfectly sanctified when they believe, meaning that they are regarded as perfectly holy for Christ's sake. This is more like justification than sanctification. We admit that, in one sense, sanctification is an act—a thing done at once—like justification—that the moment a man believes he becomes "clean"—(John xv. 3)—that there is a complete consecration (like that of the Jewish priest) through Christ's blood. It is thus we understand 1 Cor. i. 2—"Sanctified in Jesus Christ." If this be their meaning, they are playing with words, but if they mean by it a perfect freedom from sin, and that the sins of believers are not sins at all, they are the enemies of godliness and the inciters of crime. We are consecrated by the blood that we may be purified inwardly by the Holy Spirit. The vessels of the sanctuary were at once separated to God's service, but that did not imply that they did not need a daily ablution. That sanctification is properly a gradual process the Scripture uniformly affirms. (2 Peter iii. 18; Hosea xiv. 5; 1 Thes. v. 23; 2 Cor. iv. 16.)

Q. What is their doctrine on "the old man and the new man?"

A. That the Holy Ghost creates a new individual, perfectly holy, inserts him into us, leaving the whole of our old being untouched and unchanged to wage war with the new individual dropped into us.

Q. What is their usual way of putting the doctrine?

A. They say that the design of the Spirit is not to improve or sanctify the flesh or the old man—that the flesh in a believer is no better than in an unbeliever, and no better at the end of a saint's life than at the beginning—that the flesh, being crucified, dead and buried with Christ, is not to be exhumed—and that the error of the churches has always been to try the mending of the old Adam nature, which is not to be mended but crucified. They thus deny all personal and progressive sanctification.

Q. How do you meet their views?

A. Let us ask, what does the Spirit sanctify? Not the old man, for he is unchangeable; not the new man, for he is perfect and sinless. They, therefore, deny the Spirit's sanctifying work. 2. Their views are immoral, for they free the saint from all responsibility for sin committed. The new man cannot sin; and the old man, dead and buried with Christ, is not to be changed. If the old man is accountable for sin, who receives the pardon? Not the new man, for he cannot sin. Therefore it must be the old man, who confesses his sins and is washed in the blood. 3. There is no room in this doctrine for "the inward man to be renewed day by day"—(2 Cor. iv. 16)—for it is as perfect as it can be at conversion. 4. If, as we are told, "the old man was crucified with Christ"—not in Paul's, but the Brethren's sense—then, as the same person that went down into the grave with Christ also rose with him, it follows that the old man now sits with him in heavenly places.

Q. But does not Paul speak of "the old man being crucified with Christ"—(Rom. iv. 6)—and also of the new man?

A. He does. But Paul tells us that he himself was crucified with Christ—(Gal. ii. 20)—not two Pauls, but one—that he was buried (and rose with him). There were two conflicting elements within him, but still only one responsible self. Law and self were nailed to the cross—not to be annihilated, but to come forth in a new form. He was begotten again—not by a new man being dropped into him—but by his becoming a new creature. The Brethren err by too strict literality. How could they explain 2 Cor. v. 7—"Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new? How can the old man pass away? Is he not unchangeable, and is he not with us till death? No doubt, in a legal sense he is unchangeable—i.e., the members of the old man—"seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds," showing in one sense, he is put off at conversion; in another, he is put off gradually—by mortification.

Q. But does not Paul say—"It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me?"

A. Your conclusion, then, is, that sin in a believer is not sin at all. But Paul does not deny his responsibility or personality. This is his way of speaking—(Gal. ii. 20.)—"I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (1 Cor. vii. 10; xv. 10; Matt. xx. 20.)

Q. But does not John say—"Whoever is born of God sinneth not?"

A. 1. John never said the believer could not commit sin, He says the reverse. (1 John i. 6, 7.) 2. But that being born of God is the only way of deliverance from sin. 3. See similar statements. (Rom. xiv. 7; xiii. 4; John vii. 7; viii. 43; ix. 4, 12, 39.)

FAITH AND ASSURANCE.

Q. What is the Brethren's doctrine of faith?

A. They hold that "it is just believing what God has said about Jesus." But this is a mere historical belief—the mere credence of testimony. Tens of thousands believe all the facts of the Gospel just as they believe the facts of Roman history, and yet are still unconverted. This is dead faith—the faith of devils—"who believe and tremble." (James ii. 17, 19.) If this be true faith, then I can believe without the help of the Holy Spirit. The faith of the Brethren is believing "that Christ died for me." A believer is not one who is saved because he believes he is saved.

(To be continued.)