

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

A CATECHISM ON THE DOCTRINES OF THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN.

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(Continued.)

Q. Yet the alteration of the day seems to alter the law?
A. What does the Fourth Commandment require? It is the observance of one day in seven, not the observance of the seventh day, though that was the day of observance. The commandment is not "Remember the seventh day to keep it holy," but "Remember the Sabbath day."

Q. But if you are consistent you will stone the Sabbath-breaker, and not light fires on the Sabbath?

A. Where does the Fourth Commandment require this? Nowhere. The civil law of the Israelites required it, and not any other law. We are not under that law.

Q. But was not the Sabbath a "shadow of things to come" a sign of spiritual blessings?

A. So was marriage (Eph. v. 25-33); but it is still something more than a shadow or a figure. It did not pass away after it became a sign of the mystical union between Christ and believers.

Q. But Paul says—"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike." (Rom. xiv. 5.)

A. The converted Jews—along with the Lord's Day, and Baptism, and the Lord's Supper—also observed the seventh day, the Passover, and Circumcision, and it was their wish to force this double system on the Gentiles. And when Paul speaks of "days, months, times, years," the Lord's Day was not in question at all, because about its observance there was no dispute whatever in the Christian churches. Would Paul be likely to condemn his own practice? The same remark applies to Col. ii. 16.

Q. But we keep every day as a holy day?

A. You do not; for you observe the Lord's Supper only once a week, not seven days in the week. But it was true of the pious Hebrews before Christ's time as of Christians since, that they kept every day holy in your sense.

Q. Some of us observe the Sunday as Resurrection-day, in memory of that event?

A. But one Sabbath in the year will answer just as well for that purpose as fifty-two.

Q. What other evidence do you bring?

A. John says—"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." (Rev. i. 10.) This does not imply that he esteemed every day alike, but it does imply that the Jewish Sabbath was gone. Christ said:—"Pray that your flight may not be on the Sabbath day." (Matt. xxiv. 20.) That flight was to be forty years afterwards, when the Jewish Sabbath was for ever passed away. Christ would not teach an error; therefore there would be a Sabbath day after the abolition of the Jewish Sabbath. Remember too, that the day of Pentecost—the inauguration day of the Christian Church—always fell on our Sunday; and besides, that the religious services of the apostles and early Christians had a marked connection with the first day of the week. (Acts. i. 14; xx. 7; 1 Cor. xvii. 1, 2.) The first day is the only day ever mentioned by number in the New Testament.

THE CHURCH.

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

A. That the Church had no existence till the day of Pentecost; and that, therefore, the Jews were not a Church. Yet Stephen speaks of "the Church in the wilderness" (Acts vii. 38;) and the word *kahal* in Hebrew, translated "congregation," exactly corresponds to "Church" in the New Testament, and is so rendered in the Septuagint version. Hence, I infer there was a Church in the Old Testament. There is no hint in the Scripture of a new thing called the Church commencing at Pentecost. Besides, the covenant that God made with Abraham is the same covenant under which we live, with great circumstantial diversities:—"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." (Gal. iii. 14.) Remember, too, that it is the *same* "vineyard" out of which the Jewish husbandmen were cast into which we gentiles have entered. Jesus said—"The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matt. xxi. 43.) It is ridiculous to say that the Old Testament saints did not belong to the Church of Christ, "for he loved it, and gave himself for it." (Eph. v. 25.) Did he not love and give himself for the saints referred to in Heb. xi.?

Q. But Christ said—"On this rock will I build my Church." The Church was not yet built?

A. He speaks of the Church in its New Testament organization, for we are told in Eph. ii. 20—"Ye are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." The foundation is laid in Old Testament prophets, and Christ is corner-stone, according to Isaiah xxviii. 16, and Psalm cxviii. 22. The Church was thus founded before New Testament times.

Q. What further evidence can you bring?

A. Isaiah represents the Jewish Church as enlarging itself for the reception of the Gentile converts (liv. 2, 3, and lx. 4-5), and Amos (ix. 11), quoted by James at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 15), represents the Christian Church, not as the erection of a new tabernacle, but as the setting up again of the tabernacle of David which had fallen down. Paul says to the Gentiles—"Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee," showing it is Israel's old olive tree on which the Gentile Church has been grafted. This cannot refer to the invisible Church, for no branch was ever broken off from it, but to the Church as an organized and visible community. (Rom. xi. 18.) "The Gentiles are to be fellow-heirs and of the same body," thus showing that believing Jews under the Old Testament dispensation, and believing Gentiles under the New Testament, belonged to the same body, the Church, which is called Christ's body. (Eph. i. 23; Eph. iii. 6.) Christ says of Jews and Gentiles—"There shall be one fold and one Shepherd." (John x. 16.) And when Peter calls Christians "a royal priesthood," &c., he is using

words first applied to Israel. (Exod. xix. 6; Deut. vii. 6.) The identity is clearly established in 1 Cor. x.

Q. But there can be no unity between the Jewish and Christian Churches, for the one admitted by its constitution only carnal members, and the other only spiritual members!

A. I answer: 1. Carnal descent from Abraham did not entitle to membership, for the Edomites, Midianites, and Ishmaelites, were not members. 2. Even an Israelite might forfeit his position in many ways. The Church in Old Testament times consisted of professing believers and their children, just like the Church now. Faith was necessary in both cases. 4. Bad men have entered both Churches. No perfect visible communion ever existed, even in apostolic days.

Q. What is the Brethren's doctrine concerning communion?

A. That the visible Church consists of none but converted people, and that believers should hold no religious fellowship or pray with unbelievers.

Q. But is not the Scripture principle, that "separation from evil is God's principle of unity." (Darby.)

A. I answer: 1. A common rejection of error does not afford a centre of union. Romanists and Protestants equally reject Socinianism, but this rejection cannot unite them. A common affection is a principle of union. 2. The idea leads to mischievous and divisive consequences: it separates true brethren, for one brother sees evil where another sees none. 3. It makes man his brother's judge; it seals on the evil and passes by the good; and it makes one wiser and holier than the Lord, departing where he abides.

Q. But is it not said:—"Come out from among them, and be ye separate?"

A. This is used by you to justify separation from all the Churches. But the Brethren fell into the still greater evil of refusing communion with those whom Jesus loves and blesses, and of saying hard things of those they admit to be brethren in those Churches, imputing to them wrong motives, want of integrity, ignorance, disobedience to light, they forget other Scriptures equally binding—"Speak not evil of one another, brethren;" "Let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth, for God hath received him;" "Love thinketh no evil."

Q. But the duty of separation is perpetual?

A. It is clear that sins of uncleanness were very common among the Gentile converts; else why should Paul say, "Flee fornication?" And yet if the Churches consisted only of saints, why should he have addressed them in this way? Discipline was to be exercised, but separation on account of such sins is never enjoined.

Q. What is your opinion of the doctrine of a perfect Church—a Church of saints?

A. There is no authority in Scripture for it, even were such a thing possible as a perfect Church on earth. John Newton once said to a lady with ideas of a pure Church, "Well, madam, if there were a perfect Church on earth, it would cease to be so the moment you and I entered it." The Brethren have no infallible power of discerning spirits any more than their neighbours. Were Ananias and Sapphira true believers? Yet they belonged to the visible Church. Were the Seven Churches of Asia perfect and spotless? The Lord did not command his saints to come out from these Churches, though there was the presence of error as well as ungodliness, but enjoined them to cast out the evil elements. He did not bid his saints first to separate from the professing Churches in order to witness for him. Were not unbelievers present in the congregations at Corinth? (1 Cor. xiv. 23.) Were the services stopped at the entrance of unbelievers? "Some had not the knowledge of God." (1 Cor. xv. 34.) What is the meaning of "If any one who is called a brother be a fornicator"—(1 Cor. v. 11)—if the communion was perfectly pure? There were errorists who denied the Resurrection, sectarians who rent the body of Christ, and "false apostles transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." Does not Jude speak of "ungodly men turning the grace of God into lasciviousness?" Luke, of men "troubling the Church with words, subverting their souls." (Acts xv. 24.) Were these men not in communion with the Church? Were they not mixed up with believers? Who were they of whom John said, "They went from us because they were not of us?" Had they not been previously in communion with them! In Titus ii. 20, the Church is represented as a great house with vessels, some to honour and some to dishonour—implying the presence of saints and hypocrites in the same Church. The Plymouth principle is not new. The Donatists held that mixed communions were infectious, that the godly were to separate from the society of the ungodly, and, as Darby does, that the Churches were prostitute and fallen. Donatism fell about 600 A. D., through its own dissensions. Fuller says:—"There remained not two of them that were together." How like the Brethren!

Q. Where is there Scripture authority for your distinction between the Church visible and the Church invisible?

A. There is but one Church, no doubt, spoken of in Scripture, and not two Churches. The terms visible and invisible had their origin in the well-known facts, that all who profess to be believers are not really such, and that the human mind is not omniscient. The visible Church is just the Church as seen by man; the invisible, the Church as seen by the All-Seeing. Are the Brethren infallibly assured that every Plymouth Brother is a true believer? If they are not, it follows, as a matter of course, that the Church as seen and judged by themselves, is different from the Church as approved by God. Paul makes the distinction clearly between the visible and the invisible Church when he speaks of "Israel after the flesh" and "Israel after the Spirit."

Q. The Brethren, then, will have no family worship as it is generally conducted?

A. No. They exclude their children and their servants if they believe them to be unconverted, though it is hard to see why Paul prayed to God in "presence of all the ship's company," at a common meal—(Acts xxviii. 35)—or why little children should have united with their parents in prayer. (Acts xxi. 5.) It is well known that a Plymouth

brother will not say grace if all at the table are not believed to be converted. The Plymouth principle divides not only in their public gatherings, but even in their family relationships, sister refusing communion with sister, and child with parent.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PRAYER.

Q. What is the Plymouth doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit?

A. That he did not exist in the Church till the day of Pentecost, and that, being once given, it is wrong for believers to pray for the Spirit.

Q. How do you meet this opinion?

A. It was the Holy Spirit who formed the sinless nature of Jesus. (Luke i. 34.) The ministry, miracles, death and resurrection of Christ are all spoken of in connection with the Holy Spirit. (Acts x. 38; Heb. ix. 14; 1 Timothy. iii. 17.) This was all before Pentecost. See also John xx. 22—"He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." The Spirit existed in the Church before the day of Pentecost, for Peter says—"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," (1 Peter i. 21), and he speaks of "the Spirit of Christ" in the prophets, "when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." (See also Heb. iii. 7; ix. 8; Mark xii. 36; Luke iii. 22; Psalm li. 11.)

Q. But Christ said—"If I go not away, the Spirit will not come to you," implying that he was not yet in the Church?

A. The prophecy of Joel (ii. 28) explains the matter. It was not the *existence* or the *coming*, but the *extraordinary effusion* of the Spirit that was the burden of Old Testament prophecy. The Spirit was to inaugurate a new dispensation with remarkable signs—viz., speaking with tongues, working of miracles, and multitudinous conversions. When Joel spoke of the "Spirit being poured out on all flesh," he was not ignorant of the Spirit's existence and work, for it was by him that he was inspired to prophecy. (1 Pet. i. 21.)

Q. But we are told in Acts xvi. 6 of certain disciples of John at Ephesus who had not even heard that there was a Holy Ghost?

A. 1. As John's disciples, they could not be ignorant of the Spirit's *existence*, for, in baptizing them, he told them of One "who would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire." 2. The meaning is that they had not heard whether the Holy Ghost had been *given*; and no sooner did he fall upon them than these disciples (believers, he it remembered "spoke with tongues and prophesied." In John vii. 39 we read—"and the Holy Ghost was not yet"—meaning, not yet given in the visible or signal manner intended. (Acts ii. 1.) The Greek construction is the same in both passages.

Q. But why should we pray for the Holy Ghost since he has been already given? It is a mockery to ask God to repeat the gift.

A. Christ says—"How much more shall your heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke xi. 13.) If it be wrong to ask for the Spirit because he was given eighteen centuries ago, it is wrong to ask any spiritual blessing or gift, for they were all given in the gift of Christ. The Spirit was actually prayed for in Acts viii. 15. It is no mockery to ask God to repeat his gift, for Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians, who had already received the Spirit, that God might "give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph. i. 17), and says, "Be ye filled with the Spirit." (Eph. v. 18.)

Q. Does not the aid of the Spirit preclude the use of human means for the understanding of the Scriptures—for example, Commentaries on the Bible?

A. No. The Brethren deny commentaries, but they write commentaries, and tracts, and treatises of their own. One of them has written a commentary on Leviticus. What are all Plymouth tracts and treatises but commentaries on Scripture? A commentary from the lips of a preacher cannot become false by being printed in a book. The eunuch was in want of a commentary when he said to Philip—"How can I understand it, except some man should guide me?"

Q. What is the Brethren's doctrine concerning prayer?

A. That unconverted men ought not to pray for mercy, and while believers only should pray, they must not confess sin or ask its pardon, as their sin has already been put away eighteen hundred years ago by the death of Christ.

Q. What answer do you make to the first statement?

A. It is the *duty* of an unconverted man to pray, for his moral incapacity for prayer will not free him from the obligation to pray. (Acts viii. 21-23; Isaiah lv. 6, 7; Ps. lxxv. 21.) Besides, the neglect of prayer is charged as his sin. (Zeph. i. 6; Hosea vii. 7; Jer. x. 21; Psalm cxli. 2-4; x. 4; lxxix. 6; Jer. x. 25.) Besides we have instances of wicked men praying and God hearing them. (1st Kings xxi. 19; Jonah iii. 4; 2 Chron. xxvi. 5.)

(To be continued.)

SKEPTICISM.

Skepticism is of two kinds, sincere and captious. The causes are likewise two fold, intellectual and moral. With sincere, honest doubt, we should be patient and kind, lending a helping hand whenever there is opportunity. Its difficulties are chiefly intellectual, and may be, and often are, fully overcome. The other kind of skepticism, however, is far more common. It is supercilious, self-conceited, and insincere. In this case, the difficulty is not so much intellectual as it is moral. It has its source in that "evil heart of unbelief" of which the Apostle speaks, and needs discipline rather than instruction. Its existence in any person is not so much an evidence of intellectual acuteness and intelligence, as it is of a corrupt nature and a depraved heart. In most cases of the kind they are in darkness and doubt, only because they love darkness rather than light. In dealing with such people we must use discretion. Sometimes we must "answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit;" and then at other times we must "answer not a fool according to his folly, lest we be like unto him." (See Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.)—*Occident.*