

THE  
PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

(SO CALLED).

WHO THEY ARE—THEIR CREED—  
MODE OF WORSHIP, &c.

EXPLAINED IN

A Letter to his Friends and Relations.

BY

EDWARD CROWLEY.

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## PREFACE.

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THIS tract having been written for a few, it was printed for private circulation only; so many, however, having desired copies, it is now published. It must be distinctly understood, that the writer is *alone* responsible for the sentiments expressed therein.

E. C.

# THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

(SO CALLED).

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MY DEAR FRIENDS AND RELATIONS,

Finding that some of you have been inquiring, "Who are the Plymouth Brethren?" and that you have been seeking an answer from sources which can give you no correct information, I have felt led to write to you for the purpose of giving you the needed instruction, and that I hope to do in as few words as possible.

And, I suppose, in the first place, you will wish to know why I use the expression "so called"—"Plymouth Brethren *so called*." The reason is simply because there is no such term in the word of God applied to Christians, and if we were to own that title we should at once become a sect—a thing the apostle condemns by the Holy Ghost in the strongest language. (1 Cor. iii.) Most emphatically do I deny that I belong to a sect or denomination. The word of God calls us Brethren. Jesus is not ashamed to call us, and all Christians, Brethren. (Heb. ii. 11.) "Ye are *all* brethren." Often do we read of the Brethren in the Acts of the Apostles, but never of Plymouth Brethren, or any other Brethren with distinctive names, such as we now find amongst the many denominations in Christendom. Thus, then, as the Lord Jesus says we are Brethren, and He is not ashamed to own us as such, so the so-called Plymouth Brethren own themselves simply as Brethren. Not that they are more so than other believers in Jesus, for *all* who believe in Him are Brethren. If, however, Christians *will* call themselves by other names, for which they have no warrant from God, surely they who wish to keep to the terms of Scripture are not to be blamed for so doing.

Well, then, who are these Brethren—Plymouth Brethren, so called? In a word, they are sinners saved by grace—free, sovereign grace. They have been made *conscious* that they are sinners—that they have in themselves, that is, in their flesh, *no* good thing. Once they were without Christ, without God, having no hope in the world. Their hearts were deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and their minds at enmity against God. And, moreover, they have learnt that, inasmuch as it is impossible for a corrupt tree to bring forth good fruit, so it is impossible for them to do *one* good thing; that all their *apparently* good works were only so many filthy rags in the sight of God, however excellent they might seem to be in their own sight and that of others.

Thus they learnt that they could in no way save or help to save themselves; but, then, to their great joy, they found that when they were *without strength, in due time, Christ Jesus died for the ungodly*—that He came to seek and to save the lost—the sinner and not the righteous. They read that such was the love of God for poor helpless sinners, that He would not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up freely for them, that He might die in their stead, and bear all the wrath of God due on account of their sins. Jesus did this. He did die for our sins. He did bear the wrath of God due to the sinner. The Lord did lay on Jesus the iniquity of us all. Jesus having *finished* the work He came to do, God raised Him from the dead, and seated Him on His own (the Father's) throne (Rev. iii. 21), crowning Him with glory and honour (Heb. ii. 9), thus showing how well-pleased He was with that which Jesus had done; and the claims of God's justice having been met, God declares Himself just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. (Rom. iii. 25, 26.)

As Brethren read this they believed, and in believing obtained peace with God and life in Jesus. For, being justified by faith, we *have* peace with God (Rom. v. i.); and, he that believeth on the Son of God *hath* everlasting life. (John iii. 36; John v. 24.) Having read and believed all this that the Holy Ghost has recorded about Jesus and His work, could they any longer have any doubts and fears as to their salvation? Their sins were put away—they had peace with God—they had life—they were new creatures in Christ,

and they were justified from all things. (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) Well, I ask, is it possible to continue wretched and miserable knowing all this? Surely not, though strange to say, many condemn the Brethren on this account—they say they are presumptuous and wicked because *they know* their sins are washed away. It is the portion of all true believers in Jesus, if they would but enjoy it. But many are so fond of looking at self that they never know the blessedness of the man whose sins are forgiven, and condemn all those who do. Now, God has written certain things that the believer *might know* that he *has* (not *shall* have) eternal life. (1 John v. 13.) Well, then, in answer to the question, “Who are the Brethren?” I reply, that they are sinners saved through faith by God’s free, sovereign grace.

And now, will you permit me, before passing on, to ask you, my dear friends and relations, whether you know *your* sins are washed away? You will, I feel sure, readily own that it is a matter of the very last moment that you should get this question settled. I will only just observe, that there can be no remission of sins without the shedding of blood (Heb. ix. 22), and that by the pouring out of the soul unto death of the Son of God, He has put away sin (Heb. ix. 26), and he that *believeth* (not *doeth*—not *hopeth*) on the Son of God *hath* everlasting life. You may be hoping and doing, but if you are not trusting wholly and only to the blood of Jesus, all your efforts and hopes are worthless.

But again, Brethren read further in the word of God that they have not only been delivered from sin and the wrath to come, but they have been redeemed and brought to God—Christ hath once suffered the just for the unjust that He might bring us *to God*. (1 Pet. iii. 18.) They who once were afar off are now made nigh by the blood of Jesus. They read again that Christ who is “the life” is their life, and that Christ liveth in them. (Gal. ii. 20.) This Brethren believe, and seek grace to enjoy it. Be it, however, remembered that it is the portion of *all* believers in Jesus.

Again, Brethren read that the believer, saved by grace, being quickened together with Christ, is raised up together with Him, and is made to sit together in Him in the heavenlies. (Eph. ii. 5, 6.) They further read

that they are blessed with ALL (not a few only, but with *all*) spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. (Eph. i. 3.) In Jesus all the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwelleth, and believers in Jesus are complete (full) in HIM. (Col. ii. 9, 10.) Finding this is what God declares to be the *present* position and portion of those who believe in Jesus, the question is, Are we to use and enjoy these blessings? or, Does God give His children blessings which they are to look at, but not to touch or enjoy? Surely not. No, our God and Father would have His children enjoy fully all He has so freely given to them. Well, then, Brethren, knowing what their portion is, are not ashamed to confess it, and do seek, however feebly they succeed, to enjoy their portion. Who will say they are to blame? They have a peace which passeth all understanding, and a joy unspeakable and full of glory. The Lord help us to value more and more all the good things with which our God has blessed us.

The Brethren, then, are—1st, Sinners saved by grace, through faith in Him who died for them (Eph. ii. 8); 2nd, They *know* that they *are* saved, and that they *have* eternal life (1 John v. 13); 3rd, Their position is that of being seated in Christ in heavenly places (Eph. ii. 5, 6); 4th, They are blessed with ALL spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. i. 4)—complete in Him in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily. (Col. ii. 9, 10.) But I again say, that this is the position of *all* who believe in Jesus, only they do not know it, and what is worse, many do not wish to know it, at least they turn aside when one seeks to put the truth before them.

### THEIR CREED.

The creed of the so-called Plymouth Brethren may be stated in a word or two. They believe all that is written in the word of God. The testimony of a clergyman on this point may be of more weight than anything that I could say. A friend of mine, being a good deal exercised in soul about her position in the Church of England, went to her clergyman and showed him a book she had been reading, written by one of the so-called Plymouth Brethren. "Oh," said he, "you had better have nothing to do with them, *they do nothing but*

*quote chapter and verse, chapter and verse for everything.* If you will take my advice you will have nothing to do with them." I need scarcely say that my friend was the more drawn to the despised Brethren by the fact that they do give for everything chapter and verse. A young person who is working in a shop with a number of Christians of different denominations has just told me that it is a common taunt when talking on divine subjects, "Oh, here comes —— with chapter and verse as usual." The Bible is their one standard, and to that they continually appeal. They know nothing about acts of Parliament, articles of religion, catechisms, or rules drawn up. The Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is their guide; and "What saith the Lord?" is the ruling question with them, and hence the confidence, the authority, and the positive way in which they make statements as to the truth of God. They know they have God's word on their side, and therefore they can afford to be bold and decided.

### THEIR MODE OF WORSHIP.

The mode of worship which Brethren follow is most simple; nothing can be more so. In the first place, they read that it was the custom for the early Christians on the first day of the week to be gathered around the name and person of the Lord Jesus Christ, to break bread in remembrance of Him, and to show forth His death until He come. (Acts xx. 7.) Their simple object was to break bread and to worship, not to hear sermons; and therefore Brethren follow the same course. But then, it will be said, that we cannot know and see Jesus in our own strength; for Jesus said that the Holy Ghost should take of His and show them unto us, that He should dwell in and with us for that purpose; and worship only in spirit and in truth is acceptable to the Father. Therefore it is most needful that saints should be gathered around the name of Jesus, and that the Holy Ghost should have full and unhindered authority and liberty to use His own power in leading the souls of the gathered saints into the meaning and value of the death of Jesus, God's Lamb, so that praise and worship might flow forth freely to Him who is worthy of all praise and adoration.

All this Brethren freely own, and that is just what they aim at, viz., to give full and unhindered liberty to the Holy Ghost in their gatherings for worship and breaking of bread. They do not, therefore, allow *one man*, however good he may be, or however much he may have been owned of the Lord as a servant of His, to take a place of authority in the assembly for worship, because by so doing they would hinder the free operations of the Spirit of God. Jesus is the *Lord* of the table. It is not man's table, but the Lord's, and therefore Brethren seek by the Holy Ghost (for by Him alone can they say that Jesus is Lord, 1 Cor. xii. 3) to own in a practical way the Lordship of Jesus. And thus, by waiting upon Him by the Holy Ghost's power, the saints are led to see the finished work of Jesus—the beauties—the perfections of His person, and thus seeing Jesus and His wondrous love and grace, praise and worship *flow* forth by the Spirit of God. And this leads us to the subject of

### MINISTRY.

And it will be enquired, Do you not, by giving place and authority to the Holy Ghost, ignore the ministry which God has appointed for the building up of His Church? I reply, no; by no means; but, on the contrary, we own it and seek to give it its *full* and proper place. And I am bold to say that there are no Christians who are more tenacious about ministry than the so-called Plymouth Brethren. If, however, you ask me, Do Brethren send their children, whether converted or not, direct from school to the university to be trained for the ministry, as they say, and then make them possessors of *all the gifts of the ministry* by the laying on of a man's hands, and that they shall be paid so much a year for using them? then I again reply, No; by no means whatever. But when the Holy Ghost manifests that a brother has a gift, either of an evangelist, a pastor, or teacher, then the assembly thankfully owns the gift as from the Lord, and seeks to profit by the same, or at least should do so.

Now, with the exception of the Society of Friends, all the sects and denominations put the ministers in place of



the Holy Ghost; so that when they who belong to the sects go to their place of worship, as they call it, they practically declare that the Holy Ghost shall use some particular person or persons set apart for the purpose, or He shall use no one at all. Should any one else in the assembly speak a word for comfort, exhortation, or edification—for the word of God says we may all prophesy one by one (1 Cor. xiv. 31), or ye may all speak a word to comfort, exhortation, or edification (1 Cor. xiv. 3), provided it is by the Holy Ghost—I say, should any one use this liberty, he would be brought before the authorities of the world, and punished for what they call brawling. The word of God may be appealed to by the offender, but he will be at once informed that such and such an act of parliament says so and so, and that he must be accordingly punished. Thus the act of parliament sets aside the word of God. And this is just setting aside God the Holy Ghost, except on certain conditions, a sin which the so-called Plymouth Brethren hate, and have, by God's grace, ceased to do. They have seen in the word of God the place that the Holy Ghost should have in the assembly gathered for worship and the breaking of bread; they have seen too the absolute need, if there is to be blessing, of His presence when so gathered, and therefore they have (according to 2 Tim. ii. 21) purged themselves from those who do dishonour to the Holy Ghost by shutting the door against Him (except on certain human conditions), and seek to follow righteousness, faith, charity, and peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

And having done so, they who are left behind are vexed, and seek to persecute and say all sorts of evil things of those who have done what the word of God tells them to do. Thus, then, the place Brethren have been led to take by the Spirit of God is a place of trial and reproach. They have gone outside the camp (Heb. xiii.), and there they bear the reproach of Christ, seeking to testify against all the humanly-planned religious systems of the day, which they believe to be an abomination in the sight of God, seeing that they are contrary to His word and shut out the Holy Ghost.

## THEIR PLACE IN THE WORLD.

The position which Brethren have taken is one where they must expect to be despised and be nobodies, so far as the world is concerned, and so too as regards the religious world. Brethren's aim is not worldly greatness. They have no desire to be in a place of authority in this world. They seek rather to show that, though they are *in* the world, they are not *of* it, that they have been called out of it to be a separate people unto God, pilgrims in a foreign land. They seek no political power, for their conversation (citizenship) is in heaven. (Phil. iii. 20.) Brethren have no ambition for any exalted *earthly* calling, for God says theirs is not an earthly, but

A heavenly calling. Heb. iii. 1.

A heavenly hope. Col. i. 5.

A heavenly country. Heb. xi. 16.

A heavenly citizenship. Phil. iii. 20.

A heavenly home. John xiv. 3.

A heavenly inheritance. 1 Pet. i. 4.

All their aim and desire, as regards this world, is to witness against it, and by the declaration of the Gospel of the grace of God to lead sinners to Jesus, for life, peace, and joy. Again, I would say, this is not any particular blessing conferred on the Plymouth Brethren so called, but it is the portion of *all* true believers in Jesus. The question is simply whether all are enjoying, or seeking to enjoy their blessings in Christ. Brethren do wish to rejoice in their Saviour-God, and all the blessings He has given to enjoy, fully. I ask again, Are they to blame for this, and should they who are careless and indifferent to their present portion in Christ condemn those who do care for it? But so it is, and Brethren do not expect the honour, admiration, and love of the men of this age, but, on the contrary, scorn, reproach, and hatred.

## BRETHREN AND THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS.

Then, again, it is a great mistake to imagine that Brethren aim at uprooting the religious systems of the day. They

know quite well (for the word of God is very clear on the subject) that it would be absurd to have such a purpose; for there can be no doubt but that they (the religious systems) will continue their course, that they will grow worse and worse, waxing bolder and bolder against God until Antichrist himself shall be revealed, who shall oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; who shall sit in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of His coming, and consume with the Spirit of His mouth. (2 Thess. ii. 8.)

Brethren, however, do desire, pray, and use some effort (not all they should do) to deliver God's own beloved ones from the systems of men, according to the apostle's exhortation, "Be ye separate, touch not the unclean." "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial? Or *what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*" (2 Cor. vi. 14-18.)

Brethren feel that they can do this without fear of the systems themselves falling down, for the sects are so constituted, that they can go on as well without as with Christians, as, indeed, I suppose they will do, at least for a time, when Jesus comes and takes away His Church to meet Him in the air, to be for ever with the Lord. (1 Thess. iv. 16.) Brethren are not, however, very anxious to swell their numbers for the sake of numbers. As I have before stated, they have no earthly or political end in view, and therefore *mere numbers* are no object to them. Unless believers come out from their systems to the Lord, willing to bear His reproach, they get comparatively little blessing to their souls, and I am not sure that such do not bring weakness rather than strength to the gathering in which they are. Indeed such have not really left the evil, but are in spirit in it still.

But, on the other hand, when a child of God leaves his religious sect, led out *by* the Lord *to* Himself, and *for* His glory, then Brethren hail such with joy and thankfulness, as of the Lord.

It must, however, be observed, that while those who meet for worship and breaking of bread according to God's principles would rather, for *their own* spiritual joy

and comfort, have none amongst them but those who have been led by the Lord, yet they have no power or authority to reject any brother or sister who seeks communion, because the table they sit at is emphatically the Lord's table, not Brethren's, and therefore all the Lord's people who are *walking orderly* ought to sit there. It is the only table (that I am aware of) at which Jesus is allowed to exercise His Lordship, and where the Holy Ghost is permitted to use whom He will, in prayer, or in speaking to exhortation, comfort or edification. Hence it is emphatically the Lord's table. You see how decided I can afford to be when the word of God is on my side.

Thus, then, dear friends and relations, I have, as briefly as I could, set before you a few of the leading points which are characteristic of the so-called Plymouth Brethren. Should you find that I am holding anything more or anything less than the word of God teaches, please let me know what it is; for I seek truth and desire to know and to enjoy all I can, I do not wish to miss one bit of God's truth, all of which is so wonderful and so precious. And with best wishes,

Believe me,

My dear Friends and Relations,

Yours sincerely,

EDWARD CROWLEY.

126, MANOR STREET, CLAPHAM, S.,

Sept., 1865.

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