

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות עולם ירמיהו טז

“THE OLD PATHS.”—Jer. vi. 16.

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SALVATION IS OF THE JEWS. Amongst all the religious systems existing in the world, there are but two deserving of attentive consideration, and they are both of Jewish origin, and were once exclusively confined to the Jewish nation. They are now known by the names of Judaism and Christianity; but it must never be forgotten that the latter is as entirely Jewish as the former. The Author of Christianity was a Jew. The first preachers of Christianity were Jews. The first Christians were all Jews; so that, in discussing the truth of these respective systems, we are not opposing a Gentile religion to a Jewish religion, but comparing one Jewish creed with another Jewish creed. Neither, in defending Christianity, do we wish to diminish aught from the privileges of the Jewish people, on the contrary, we candidly acknowledge that we are disciples of the Jews, converts to Jewish doctrines, partakers of the Jewish hope, and advocates of that truth which the Jews have taught us. We are fully persuaded that the Jews whom we follow were in the right—that they have pointed out to us “the old paths,” “the good way,” and “we have found rest to our souls.” And we, therefore, conscientiously believe, that those Jews who follow the opposite system are as wrong as their forefathers, who, when God commanded them to walk in the good old way, replied, “We will not walk therein.” Some modern Jews think that it is impossible for a Jew to be in error, and that a Jew, because he is a Jew, must of necessity be in the right. Such persons seem to have forgotten how the majority of the people erred in making the golden calf—how the generation that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness because of their unbelief—how the nation at large actually opposed and persecuted the truth of God in the days of Elijah—how their love of error sent them into the Babylonish captivity—and how there has been some grievous error of some kind or other, which delivered them into the hands of the Romans, and has kept them in a state of dispersion for so many hundred years. But the passage from which our motto is taken sets forth most strikingly the possibility of fatal mistake on the part of the

Jewish nation, and also the possibility, in such a case, of God’s turning to the Gentiles. “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore, hear ye nations, שמעו הגוים, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth; behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.”—Jer. vi. 16—19. Who will dare to deny, after such a passage, the possibility of a Jew’s being in error?

But some may ask, what is Judaism? what is Christianity? ANSWER.—Judaism is that religious system contained and acknowledged in the prayers of the Jewish synagogue, whether German or Portuguese, and professed by all who use them as the ritual of their worship. Christianity is the religious system taught in the New Testament; or, in other words, Judaism is the Old Testament explained according to the traditional law, תורה שבכל פה. Christianity is the Old Testament explained according to the New. According to this explanation, the Jewish Prayer-book teaches the divine authority of the oral law. Of this there can be no doubt, for, in the first place, the whole ritual of the synagogue service, and the existence and arrangement of the synagogue itself, is according to the prescription of the oral law, as may be seen by comparing the Jewish prayers with the Hilchoth T’phillah. If it be asked why the Jew uses these prayers, and no other—why he wears phylacteries (תפילין) and the veil (טלית)—why he conforms to certain ceremonies at the New year, and the Day of Atonement, and the other feasts—why he repeats a certain benediction at the reading of the law—why he reads out of a parchment roll, rather than out of a printed book—why a roll of the law written in one way is lawful, and in another way unlawful, the only answer is, The oral law

commands us thus to do. The whole synagogue worship, therefore, from the beginning to the end of the year, is a practical confession of the authority of the oral law, and every Jew who joins in the synagogue worship does, in so far, conform to the prescriptions of Rabbinism. But, secondly, the Jewish Prayer-book explicitly acknowledges the authority of the oral law. In the daily prayers, fol. 11, is found a long passage from the oral law, beginning,

איחודו מקומן של זבחים

"which are the places where the offerings were slaughtered," &c. On fol. 12, we find the thirteen Rabbinical rules for expounding the law, beginning שמיאל אומר "Rabbi Ishmael says," &c. At the end of the daily prayers we find a whole treatise of the oral law, called, שפרק אבות, "the ethics of the fathers," the beginning of which treatise asserts the transmission of the oral law. In the morning service for Pentecost, there is a most comprehensive declaration of the authority and constituent parts of the oral law. "He, the Omnipotent, whose reverence is purity, with his mighty word he instructed his chosen, and clearly explained the law, with the word, speech, commandment, and admonition, in the Talmud, the Agadah, the Mishna, and the Testament, with the statutes, the commandment, and the complete covenant," &c., p. 89. In this prayer, as used, translated, and published by the Jews themselves, the divine authority of the oral law is explicitly asserted, and the Talmud, Agadah, and Mishna, are pointed out as the sources where it is to be found. For these two reasons, then, we conclude that the Judaism of the Jewish Prayer-book is identical with the Judaism of the oral law, and that every Jew who publicly joins in those prayers does, with his lips at least, confess its divine authority.

Having explained what we mean by Judaism, we now go on to another preliminary topic. Some one may ask, what is the use of discussing these two systems? May they not both be safe ways of salvation for those that profess them? To this we must, according to the plain declarations of these systems themselves, reply in the negative. The New Testament denounces the oral law as subversive of the law of God. "Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for commandments the doctrines of men." (Mark vii. 5—7.) The oral law is still more exclusive. It excludes from everlasting life all

who deny its authority, and explicitly informs us that Christians are comprehended in this anathema,—

ואלו הן שאין להן חלק לעולם הבא אלא נכרתים ואומרים וידינון על גדה תועים המאמין לעולם לעולם עולמי המינים האפיקורסין והנזירים בתורה וכו'

"These are they who have no part in the world to come, but who are cut off, and perish, and are condemned on account of the greatness of their wickedness and sin, for ever, even for ever and ever, the heretics and the Epicureans, and the deniers of the law," &c. Here is the general statement. But to prevent all mistake, a particular definition of each of these classes is added, from which we extract the following passage:—

שלושה הן הכופרים בתורה האומר שאין התורה מעם ד' אפילו סטק אחד אפילו חיבה אחת אם אמר כשה אמר מפי עצמו הרי זה כופר בתורה וכן הכופר בפרושיה תהיה תורה שבעל פה המוכשר מנידיה כגון צדוק ובירום והאומר שהתורה החליף מצדה זו במצדה אחרת וכבר בשלה תורה זו אין על פי שדאי התורה מעם ה' כגון הנזירים וההגרים לאחד משלושה אלה כופר בתורה:

"There are three classes of the deniers of the law. He who says that the law is not from God, yea, even one verse or one word: or if he says that Moses gave it of his own authority. Such an one is a denier of the law. Thus, also, he who denies its interpretations; that is, the oral law, and rejects its Agadoth as Sadok and Baithos; and he who says that the Creator has changed one commandment for another, and that the law has long since lost its authority, although it was given by God, as the Christians and Mahometans, each of these three is a denier of the law."—Hilchoth T'shuvah, c. iii. 8.

In the first extract we see that those persons called "deniers of the law," are, according to the doctrine of modern Judaism, shut out from a hope of salvation. In the second extract we see that Christians are by name included in that class: from the two together it inevitably follows that modern Judaism teaches that Christians cannot be saved. We do not find any fault with modern Judaism for pronouncing this sentence; we do not tax the Jews either with uncharitableness or intolerance because of this opinion. On the contrary we honour those, who conscientiously holding this opinion, have the honesty and the courage to declare it. If they consider us as deniers of the law, they must, of course, believe that our state is far from safe; and if this be their conviction, the best proof which they can give of true charity, is to warn us of our danger. But, at the same time, when a religious system condemns us by name, and pronounces sentence concerning our eternal state in so decided a tone,

and that simply because we dissent from some of its tenets, we not only think that we have a right to defend ourselves and our religion, but consider it our bounden duty to examine the grounds on which a system of such pretension rests, and honestly, though quietly, to avow our reasons for rejecting it. We know, indeed, that there are some Rabbinical Jews, who think this sentence harsh, and consider themselves justified in denying it, because there is another sentence in this same oral law, which says, "that the pious amongst the nations of the world have a part in the world to come." But can they prove, by any citation from the oral law, that Christians are included "amongst the pious of the nations of the world?" If they can, then they will prove that in one place the oral law denies, and in another place affirms the salvability of Christians; that is, they will prove that the oral law contains palpable contradictions, and therefore cannot be from God. If they cannot produce any such citation, then the general declaration that "the pious of the nations of the world" may be saved, is nothing to the purpose; for the same law which makes this general declaration, does also explicitly lay down the particular exception in the case of Christians, and that after it has made the general declaration. In fact, the exception follows close on the heels of the general rule. The general rule is,

כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא וכן הסדי
אמרו העולם יש להם חלק לעולם הבא :

"All Israel has a share in the world to come and also the pious of the nations of the world have a share in the world to come." The words which immediately follow this declaration contain the exception,—

ואלו הן שאין להם חלק וכו'

"But these are they which have no part in the world to come," &c. This exception is, therefore, plainly made in order to guard against any false inference from the general statement, and, therefore, according to the oral law, Christians cannot be saved. We proceed, therefore, to inquire into the merits of this system, which makes so decided a statement respecting our eternal state. We have a standard of comparison to which no Jew will object, even that Holy Book, which contains the writings of Moses and the prophets. We reject the oral law, not because it seems in itself bad or good to our judgment, but because it is repugnant to the plain words of the Old Testament. There is not space to enter at large into the proof at present, but we subjoin one passage, which is in itself amply sufficient to disprove the divine authority of any religious system where it occurs. In the Talmud, in the Treatise Pesachim, fol. 49. col. 2, we read as follows:—

אמר רבי אלעזר עם הארץ מותר לנהדרו ביום הכיפורים שזול להיות בשבת אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי אמרו לשדמו אמר להן זה כשען ברכה זה איט שען ברכה :

Rabbi Eleazar says, "It is lawful to split open the nostrils of an amhaaretz (an unlearned man) on the Day of Atonement which falls on the Sabbath. His disciples said to him, Rabbi, say rather that it is lawful to slaughter him. He replied, That would require a benediction, but here no benediction is needful." It is hardly needful to remind the reader that the law of Moses says, ואל תרצח, "Thou shalt not kill." But there is in this passage a sneering contempt for the unlearned, which is utterly at variance with the character of Him "whose mercies are over all his works," the unlearned and the poor, as well as the mighty and the learned.

Indeed the passage is so monstrous, that one is almost inclined to think that it must have crept into the Talmud by mistake; or, at the least, to expect that it would be followed by reprehension the most explicit and severe. But no, a little lower down another of these "wise men" says,

עם הארץ מותר לקורעו כרג

"It is lawful to rend an amhaaretz like a fish;" and, a little above, an Israelite is forbidden to marry the daughter of such a person, for that she is no better than a beast. But the whole of the preceding passage is so characteristic of the spirit of Rabbinism, that it is worth inserting—

תנו רבנן וכו'

"Our Rabbies have taught. Let a man sell all that he has, and marry the daughter of a learned man. If he cannot find the daughter of a learned man, let him take the daughter of the great men of the time. If he cannot find the daughter of a great man of the time, let him marry the daughter of the head of a congregation. If he cannot find the daughter of the head of a congregation, let him marry the daughter of an almoner. If he cannot find the daughter of an almoner, let him marry the daughter of a schoolmaster. But let him not marry the daughter of the unlearned, for they are an abomination, and their wives are vermin; and of their daughters it is said, 'cursed is he that lieth with any beast.'" Here, again, one is inclined to suppose that there is a mistake, or that these words were spoken in jest, though such a jest would be intolerably profane; but all ground for such supposition is removed on finding this passage transcribed into the digest of Jewish law, called the Shulchan Aruch, part 2; in the Hilchoth P'riah ur'viah, by which transcription it is stamped with all the authority of a law. Here, then, the reader is led to think, that an amhaaretz must mean something more

and worse than an unlearned man—that it ought, perhaps, to be taken in its literal signification, “people of the land,” and that it may refer to the idolatrous and wicked Canaanites. But the common usage of the Talmud forbids a supposition. There is a well-known sentence which shows that even a High Priest might be an amhaaretz,

הרים ה' די מכור למין הגדול עם הארץ

“A learned man, though illegitimate, goes before a High Priest, who is an amhaaretz.” Here the amhaaretz is plainly opposed to him that is learned. And so, on the page of the Talmud from which we have quoted above, we find the following words:—

עם הארץ אסור לאכול בשר בהמה ואסור לאכול חיות הבהמה העוף כל העוסק בתורה מותר לאכול בשר בהמה ועוף וכול שאינו עוסק בתורה אסור לאכול בשר בהמה ועוף :

“An amhaaretz is forbidden to eat the flesh of a beast, for it is said, ‘This is the law of the beast and the fowl.’ (Levit. xi. 46.) Every one that laboureth in the law, it is lawful for him to eat the flesh of the beast and the fowl. But for him who does not labour in the law, it is forbidden to eat the flesh of the beast and the fowl.” According to this passage an amhaaretz is one who does not labour in the study of the law; and it being found on the very same page with the above most revolting declarations, it plainly shows the proud and haughty spirit of the authors of the Talmud, and their utter contempt for the poor, whose circumstances preclude them from the advantages of study. But, in reading such passages, the question naturally suggests itself, to which of the two classes does the poor Jewish population of London

belong? There must be at the least hundreds, if not thousands of poor Jews in this great city who cannot possibly devote themselves to study. Amongst whom, then, are they to be classed? Amongst the learned חכמים? or amongst the unlearned עמי הארץ? Are they, their wives, and daughters, as the Talmud says, to be called an abomination, vermin, and compared to the beasts? Or can a religion inculcating such sentiments proceed from that Holy One who is no respecter of persons? See here, ye children of Abraham, whom the providence of God has placed amongst the children of poverty, and cut off from the advantages of a learned education. You are not disciples of the wise, nor the great men of the time, nor heads of synagogues, nor almoners, nor even schoolmasters. You are quite shut out from these classes whom your Talmudical doctors favour so highly. See, then, in the above passages, what the Talmud says of yourselves, your wives, and daughters? Can you believe that is the law of the God of Israel? Can you think for one moment, that these doctors knew “the old paths,” “the good way?” If you do we must assure you that we cannot. We rather find it in that book, which says, “Blessed is the man that considereth the poor and needy.” (Psalm xli. 1.) And in that other book, which speaks in the same spirit, and says that “God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise; and the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence.” (1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

ירמיהו ו' טז

כה אמר יהוה עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם אי זה דרך הטוב ולכו בה ומצאו מרגוע לנפשכם ויאמרו לא נלך :

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