

Baptism.

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BAPTISM.

THE place baptism has in the Holy Scriptures shows that its proper observance is of real importance, and the tendency in our day to make light of it indicates the need of our being reminded of the command of our Lord and the practice and teaching of His apostles. We are under the disadvantage of being surrounded by systems in which infant baptism is *taught* and infant sprinkling is *practised*, and some who have been brought to God and led to trust in Christ for salvation still cherish the idea that they were baptized in infancy and consider that sufficient. Those who really believe this must be regarded as responsible to God in the matter.

Those who have learnt the truth and have carried it out must not judge those who have not as being wilfully disobedient, and surely they would not please God by regarding them as outside the pale of that fellowship into which all who have been born of God are called, and which is only forfeited by wickedness in practice or fundamental error in doctrine. At the same time great care is needed in bearing with an error, lest any command of the Lord be treated as though it were of little consequence, and that those who know the truth on this subject could allow any *teaching* that is contrary to it is, of course, out of the question. While those who live in what are called Christian countries should seek to give baptism its proper place, it is especially needful for those who carry the gospel to other lands to do so.

The commission of our Lord is clearly expressed in the two Gospels in which baptism is mentioned. In Matthew xxviii. 19, 20 we read, "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (R.V.). In Mark xvi., "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (R.V.). The order laid down in these words is beyond question. Those sent by the Lord were (1) to preach the gospel, and thus make disciples; (2) to baptize them; (3) to instruct them in all the commandments of the Lord.

The way in which this was carried out we learn from the Acts of the Apostles. In chap. ii., "They that

received his word were baptized.” In chap. viii., “When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” When the eunuch received Christ, he said, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” showing the effect of Philip’s teaching. In chap. ix., Saul of Tarsus, when the Son of God was revealed in him, “was baptized,” and in chap. x., Cornelius and his friends, who had listened to and received the Word and “the gift of the Holy Ghost,” were commanded by Peter “to be baptized.” Thus it was (chap. xvi.) with Lydia and her household and the jailor and his family—he “believing in God with all his house,” and (chap. xviii.) with many at Corinth. The only case in which it is possible even to *raise the*

question whether any were baptized who did not believe is that of Lydia, and there is not the slightest evidence to show that it was so, but, on the contrary, everything indicates that this is in perfect harmony with all the other records of baptism. Amongst those baptized at Corinth was "the household of Stephanas," and the same household "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (1 Cor. i. 16; xvi. 15).

That baptism is not necessary to salvation is proved by the case of the dying robber to whom the Lord said, "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise"; on the other hand, evidence that baptism does not regenerate a person is found in the case of Simon the sorcerer, who was baptized by Philip and yet was still "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." But Simon had *professed*

to be a believer, and there is not the slightest evidence that in the days of the apostles any were baptized who did not profess personal faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Acts viii. 37 has not been cited, because some deem it not to be part of the original text; though it is quoted by Irenæus, Cyprian, Jerome and Augustine. If, however, this judgment be correct, it bears its own witness in another way. Westcott and Hort regard it as "derived from common Christian practice." If Luke wrote it, the condition of baptism is clear; if it was added later, it bears testimony to the fact that for some good while after the days of the apostles it was fully recognized that personal faith in Jesus as the Son of God preceded baptism. The late Bishop C. Wordsworth quoted the following from Justin Martyr, "As

many persons as believe that the things which we preach are true, and who promise to live accordingly . . . are brought to a place where is water . . . and are baptized in water in the name of the Father of all, and of Jesus Christ our Saviour, and of the Holy Ghost.”

With regard to the *mode* of baptism, it may be said that no scholar will try to contend that the Greek word which we have in an English dress denotes anything less than immersion, or that anything else was practised in the early Church. On Acts viii. 38 the late Dean Plumptre wrote,* “The

* I purposely quote from those whose scholarship is beyond question, and who honestly express the meaning of the Scriptures, though it is against their own practice of sprinkling infants. Those who read Greek may consult Liddell & Scott’s and Robinson’s Lexicons; but every one may see that the book of Common Prayer *enjoins* immersion though it *allows* sprinkling.

Greek preposition might mean simply ‘*unto* the water,’ but the universality of immersion in the practice of the early Church supports the English version.” So, on Col. ii. 12, Bishop Moule says, “The immersion of the baptized is undoubtedly here in view.” Dr. A. Maclaren quotes Bishop Lightfoot’s paraphrase, “Ye were buried with Christ to your old selves beneath the baptismal waters,” and he well asks, “If baptism be immersion, and immersion express a substantial part of its meaning, can sprinkling or pouring be baptism ?”

When we come to the *meaning* of baptism (which in this short paper can only be briefly touched), what has been said above as to the *subjects* and the *mode* is abundantly confirmed. This meaning is most fully set forth in Romans vi., where we learn that in baptism we show forth what is true of

us in Christ. In chap. v. the apostle has declared that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound," and then, anticipating mere carnal reasoning, he asks, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" This question he meets first with an indignant "God forbid," or, away with such a thought, and then with a counter question, "We that died to sin—how shall we live any longer therein?" He then casts them back on what they had confessed in their baptism. When they were baptized into Jesus Christ, they were baptized into His death. "Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (v. 4). The great truth that we died with Christ and were quickened together with Him

underlies all the teaching of this chapter. That which is true in Christ of all believers we give expression to in baptism. Dr. David Brown wrote, "The baptism of believers is a public proclamation on their part that they have surrendered the whole state and life of sin." The giving ourselves into the hands of another to be buried in the water is a confession that we died with Christ when He died in our stead, and our being brought up again tells of resurrection. We thus identify ourselves with Him in death and resurrection. How can we possibly do this unless we know Christ as the One who died and rose again for us? (2 Cor. v. 15). And how can this be expressed except by the immersion of the whole body? Nothing else answers to burial.

Some have misunderstood the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. i. 17, as

if he set aside baptism. But had it been so, he surely would not have baptized those who were "The first-fruits of Achaia" (1 Cor. i. 16; xvi. 15). He does not express thankfulness that no others were baptized. It is evident that the usual order was followed at Corinth, for "many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts xviii. 8). The reason the apostle gives for thanking God that he personally had baptized so few at Corinth was "*lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name.*" Of Peter we are told that he "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord," which seems to indicate that he did not baptize them himself, and apparently it was so with Paul; but let it be remembered that it was under his guidance that Lydia and the jailor were baptized (Acts xvi.), and also the twelve men at Ephesus

(chap. xix.). If Paul had in any respect set aside baptism, he would not have spoken of it as he did in Rom. vi. and Col. ii. some years later. Had space permitted, we might well have enlarged upon the teaching set forth in these passages and 1 Peter iii. ; but it is hoped that the reference to them will lead to further meditation. Let us never forget, however, that while knowledge of the *teaching* of baptism must prevent any mistake either as to the *subjects* or the *mode*, it is possible to be very clear on these points and yet not so learn its teaching as to “*walk in newness of life.*”

APPENDIX.

Some years ago the late Dr. Maclean published a leaflet giving the Scriptures on Baptism, so that any one might examine them, and it is thought well to append them here. It may also be helpful to compare

Circumcision and Baptism.

Circumcision was for all *males* born into Israel; Baptism is for *all* who are born into the family of God, in which, in this respect, "there is neither male nor female": or, to put it in another way, Circumcision was for all the natural "seed of Abraham"; Baptism is for all the spiritual seed of Abraham, for "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. iii. 26-29).

John's Baptism.

MATT. iii. 5-12; xxi. 25. MARK i. 4-8; xi. 30. LUKE iii. 3-16; vii. 29, 30; xx. 3-8. JOHN i. 25-34; iii. 23-26; x. 40. ACTS i. 5, 22; x. 37; xi. 16; xiii. 24; xviii. 25; xix. 3, 4.

Baptism of the Lord by John.

MATT. iii. 13-17. MARK i. 9-11. LUKE iii. 21, 22.

Baptism by our Lord's Disciples.

JOHN iii. 22 ; iv. 1-3.

The Command to Baptize.MATT. xxviii. 18-20. MARK xvi. 15, 16.
(Comp. LUKE xxiv. 46, 47.)**Examples of Baptism in ACTS.***Three Thousand at Pentecost.*—ii. 37-42.*The Samaritans.*—viii. 12-17.*The Eunuch.*—viii. 35-39.*Paul.*—ix. 18 ; xxii. 16.*Cornelius and others.*—x. 42-48 ; xi. 15-18.*The Corinthians.*—xviii. 8. (1 Cor. i. 12-17.)*Baptism of Disciples at Ephesus.*—xix. 1-7.**Baptism of Believing Households.***Cornelius.*—Acts x. 1, 2, 47, 48.*Lydia.*—Acts xvi. 15.*The Philippian Jailor.*—Acts xvi. 29-34.*Stephanas.*—1 Cor. i. 16 ; xvi. 15.

There is nothing to indicate whether Lydia was a married woman, or of whom her household consisted.

Spiritual Teaching of Baptism.

ROM. vi. 1-5. 1 COR. xii. 13.

GAL. iii. 26, 27. EPH. iv. 1-6. COL. ii. 9-12.

Figurative Allusions to Baptism.

MATT. xx. 22, 23 ; MARK x. 38, 39.

LUKE xii. 50.

1 COR. x. 1, 2 ; xv. 29 ; 1 PETER iii. 18-22.



The Greek word rendered *baptisms* in Heb. vi. 2 is in chap. ix. 10 translated *washings* ; see also Mark vii. 4, 8.