

L. C. R.
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A LETTER TO A FRIEND

ON

BAPTISM.

MY DEAR M****,

I can assure you that it was with deep thankfulness that I read your last letter, thankfulness to God that He who hath begun the good work in you is so graciously carrying it on by the teaching of His Spirit, and that though cut off in measure from outward privileges, you still are rich in Him.

You tell me that during the last few months your mind has been not a little exercised upon several subjects connected with the truth. Like the Eunuch of old, you say, "How can I understand except some man should guide me?" I answer, remember Christ's words, "It is expedient for you that I go away;" "the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." My object in this letter will be, not to give you my words, but the words of the Spirit of God: may He be your teacher.

Your first difficulty is about baptism. You say—"What is the meaning of being '*buried with Christ by baptism*'?" (Rom. vi, 4.) and again, "what does St. Peter mean when he says, '*baptism doth now save us*'?" (1 Pet. iii, 21.) The answer to both questions is perfectly clear as soon as you understand what is God's meaning in the ordinance of baptism. This, alas! how few understand.

And here before I enter upon the subject in detail, I must say one or two words by way of introduction,—words indeed which I ought not to be obliged to say to a Christian, but which the apostasy of the professing church has forced us constantly to be repeating. By way then



of introducing the subject to you clearly, let me first ask you,—*What is the Christian's position as respects God, and as respects the world?* The Bible says, the Christian's position is Christ's position ; “as He is, so are we in this world ;” (1 John iv, 17;) “we are not of the world, even as He is not of the world ;” “He is the head, we are the members,” and both united make “one body,” so we are no more twain but one flesh in God's sight, “members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” Just as the natural body is not perfect without all its members, so also is Christ: and therefore, (O blessed truth,) “the Head cannot say to the feet I have no need of you.” Christ, the Head, cannot say to us poor sinners, who as His feet go toiling through the mire, “I have no need of you.” Christ without us, (us believers, I mean,) cannot be made perfect. I repeat it, that as the body is not perfect without each and all its members, so Christ is not perfected alone. In a word, the Church and Christ, in God's estimation, “are not twain but one flesh,” (see Eph. v, 30, 32,) and therefore in 1 Cor. xii, 12, the Holy Spirit calls the Church Christ ; “so also is Christ.” The argument of the passage demands that he should say, “so also is *the Church* :” but in God's sight the Church and Christ “are not twain but one,” therefore the apostle writes, “So also is *Christ* ;” for, as he explains himself in verse 27 of the same chapter, “*Ye are the body of Christ*,” “and no one ever yet hated his own body, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church ; for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

O dear M****, I am almost tempted to let baptism take care of itself, to dwell on this blessed truth that the church is Christ's body, and Christ is the church's head ; and consequently that “as He is, so are we ;” His name our name,—His riches, our riches,—His righteousness, our righteousness ; while on the other hand, our sins are His sins,—our transgressions His transgressions,—our shame His shame. “*My sins*,” He says, “are not hid from thee.” (Psalm lxix, 5.) “*Mine iniquities* have taken hold

upon me." (Psalm xl, 12.) Do you say, How is this—how can Christ have sin?—was He not "*holy, harmless, and separate from sinners?*"—was He not "in all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin?*" Yes, He was all this, and much more: "but though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor,"—though He was God, yet for us He became man,—though He was the righteous one, yet He took the sinner's place, and was dealt with for sin; "He was made *sin* for us, who knew no sin, that we might be"—what?—pardoned? more than that;—accepted? more than that—that *we*, we poor sinners, "might be made *the righteousness of God* in him."

This is the secret which "eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had entered into the heart of man the things which God hath revealed to us by His Spirit, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God;" (1 Cor. ii, 9—12;) this was "the mystery which was hid from ages and generations, but which now is made manifest to the saints;" (Col. i, 26;) this is "the Spirit of adoption," which the Old Testament believers, justified though they were, never saw. They, (the believers under the old dispensation,) stood before God as *servants*, favoured servants, I allow,—servants who knew their Master would bless them, but servants still, for sonship was unknown: their spirit was "a spirit of bondage," (Gal. iv, 1—5,) and so Peter speaks of it in Acts xv. But we are "*sons*" and "*dear children*;" (Rom. viii, 14—17, and Eph. v, 1;) "and because we are *sons*, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Father;" (Gal. iv, 6;) mark the words,—"*the Spirit of his Son*," "not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption," "the Spirit of His Son;" that as Christ stands in all perfect acceptance and confidence and assurance before God, knowing that He is precious, and knowing that He is loved: so in Him do we, for He is our Head, and we are His members, and His spirit is our spirit, and we are "in Him," "buried with Him," "dead with Him," "risen with Him."

Now, this truth, this "mystery," as Paul terms it, (Eph. iii, 4—6,) "this mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now re-

vealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, even that the Gentiles should be *fellow-heirs* and *of the same body*,"—this mystery it is which Baptism is designed to represent. And how should the Church understand the emblem if it does not know the reality? how is it likely they should have right thoughts about the darkened shadow while their eyes are as yet blind to the substance? I don't wonder then at Christians being bewildered about baptism, (nor indeed do I wonder at their being bewildered about anything,) as long as they remain in ignorance of God's thoughts and God's purposes concerning "His Son" and "the bride:" for until we know what it is to be "*in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus*," we are children liable to be "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive,"—looking at our own poor flesh instead of looking at Christ; considering our own sinful nature instead of considering Him, and that through Him "we are made *partakers of the divine nature*," (2 Pet. i, 4,) "partakers of the heavenly calling," (Heb. iii, 1,) yea "partakers of Christ." (Heb. iii, 14.) The proper spirit for a Christian is Abraham's spirit, the spirit of faith: "he *considered not his body now dead*;" (Rom. iv, 19;) why then should we consider our body now dead,—why worry ourselves about what the Lord has buried in His grave? But this again brings me back to Baptism.

Let me gather up the thought I want you to get hold of: it is this:—Christ and the Church are one; "as He is, so are we in this world." The question then is, *What is Christ's position, as respects the world on the one hand, and as respects God on the other?* As respects the world He is dead, "killed and cast out of his vineyard:" (Matt. xxi, 38, 39:) the life He took from His mother, the life of Adam, that life He laid down for us at the hands of wicked men; and when He laid it down and died, the Church His body died with Him, (Rom. vi, 5—11,) and when He rose, the Church rose with Him, for "we are quickened *together with Christ*," as Paul says to the Ephesians; "begotten again," as Peter says,—"*to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*." (1 Pet.

i, 3.) And what is the ground of this? simply the truth I have touched upon at the commencement of this letter, that Christ and the Church are one, that "as He is, so are we in this world." As He died in the flesh, so the Church, being one with Him, is to "reckon itself dead;" (Rom. vi, 8;) as He rose from His grave, so we in Him are "risen." (Col. iii, 1.) As He was "made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power *by His resurrection*;" (Rom. i, 4;) so we, though the sons of Adam by natural birth, are likewise "begotten again (or regenerated) to a lively hope *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ* from the dead." (1 Pet. i, 3.) Christ was "declared" or manifested "to be the Son of God *by His resurrection*:" and thus the prophecy, "thou art my Son, *this day* have I begotten thee," is in the New Testament (see Acts xiii, 32, 33) referred to Christ's resurrection rather than to His birth, for though "the Son" before, He was not manifested as such until His resurrection. In like manner the Church is "begotten again *by the resurrection of Jesus*:" and therefore the Holy Spirit says by Peter, "the like figure whereunto even baptism doth now save us, *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*." (1 Pet. iii, 21.)

But you say you do not quite understand this:—then let me try to put it yet plainer. You know the Christian has two natures: he is child of Adam by natural birth, and child of God by spiritual birth. In his old nature he is "in Adam," and as such, without doing a single act, good or evil, he comes in for Adam's inheritance, death; in his new nature, he is "in Christ," and as such he comes in for Christ's inheritance, life. (1 Cor. xv, 22.) Just as a babe without a single evil act, simply because it is in Adam, is implicated in Adam's sin, and comes in for Adam's reward, death; so the young Christian, "the babe of Christ," being God's child by faith, (Gal. iii, 26,) without a single good act, just because it is by God's gift united to Christ, comes in for Christ's reward, eternal life. And what follows?—why this, that as members of, and one with, Christ; since He died in the flesh, we have died also; (Rom. vi, 2;) since He has been raised up, we have "risen with Him;" (Col. iii, 1;) for

"God hath raised us up, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" (Eph.^s ii, 6.) in a word, that as Christ has died, so we as old creatures have died; and as Christ liveth, so we as new creatures in Him live also. We are to judge thus concerning ourselves, (2 Cor. v, 14,) and all practical exhortation to "die daily" is founded upon the one finished death in Christ. "Ye have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God: mortify *therefore*." (Col. iii, 3, 5.)

And this is just what Baptism represents.* It is the sign of death with Christ, and resurrection with Him: and therefore we are said, as in Romans vi, to have been "buried with Christ by baptism," because in it we signify that God has laid our old flesh in His grave; and, as in 1 Peter iii, to have been "saved by His resurrection through baptism," because in that baptism we profess to have new life in Him risen. When I go down into the water and my body is laid under it, it is the outward emblem of my old man having been buried in Christ's grave. It shews that God has buried the dead out of His sight. So too when I am raised from the water, it is the sign that I have risen in Christ, and in Him, profess a life which the grave cannot take from me, even life in Christ risen. The submitting to receive this sign is our confession.

But you will understand this better if you look with me for a moment at Romans vi. At the end of the 5th chapter the apostle has been preaching the exceeding fulness of the grace of God,—“where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin reigned unto death, so might grace reign.” Now this full statement of grace seemed open to an objection. The objection was this,—(and it is one which has always been made to the doctrines of grace,)—“If this be true, if grace is what you say it is, so rich, so free, let us continue in sin that grace may abound.” Now how does Paul, or rather

* With regard to John's Baptism, it was not Christian Baptism. It had no reference to the believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection; and therefore "certain disciples" who had only received John's Baptism were rebaptized by the direction of the apostle Paul, "in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts xix, 1—5.) John's Baptism was "unto repentance:" (Mat. iii, 11.) Christ's Baptism is "unto His death." (Rom. vi, 4.)

the Spirit of God in Paul, meet this objection? Does he say, as is sometimes said, that mere gratitude for God's love forbids such an idea? does he say that the greatness of the favour done to us must necessarily make us obedient? Nothing of the sort. His answer is just this,—“How shall we that *have died* to sin *live* any longer therein;” in other words, How can a *dead* man *live*? “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? How CAN we? How CAN we that HAVE DIED to sin, LIVE any longer in it?”

But you will say perhaps,—“died to sin?—what does the apostle mean?—how have I died to sin?” Now mark his answer: “Know ye not that so many of us as have been baptized into Jesus Christ, have been *baptized into His death*?” Don't you know this? Are you a Christian, and do you not know that when you were baptized that very baptism was a profession of your having *died* with Christ? “Know ye not that so many of us as have been baptized into Jesus Christ have been baptized *into His death*: therefore we have been *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 should walk in newness of life.” In other words, at our baptism we signify, that, having life in Christ, we have laid down the life of Adam in the grave of Christ, that henceforth “*as* Christ was raised, *even so* we should walk in newness of life.” For,—as he goes on—“if we have been planted together in the likeness of His *death*, we shall be also in the likeness of His *resurrection*; knowing this that our old man hath been *crucified* with Him, that the body of sin (that is the sinful body) might be *destroyed*, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” His argument then is just this:—Talk of “continuing in sin that grace may abound!” don't you know that in your baptism you professed to have a new life, and that the old life had been destroyed and crucified; and if your old sinful self has been crucified on the cross of Christ, how can you live to it? “He that hath died hath been freed from sin.” A dead man cannot be alive to that to which he hath died: so he that hath died to sin, cannot henceforth continue to be its slave.

But does the truth stop here? far from it. Christ does

not leave us in His grave. "He is not there, He is risen :"
and "as He is, so are we in this world," members of His
body, joint heirs with Him. Therefore the apostle at
once goes on,—“now if we have *died* with Christ, we
believe that we shall also *live* with Him; knowing that
Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death
hath no more dominion over Him; for in that He died,
He died unto sin *once*, and in that He liveth, He liveth
unto God; likewise *reckon ye also yourselves to be dead*
indeed unto sin, *but alive unto God through Jesus Christ*
our Lord: neither yield ye your members as instruments
of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto
God *as those that are alive from the dead*, and your mem-
bers as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin
shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under
the law but under grace.” So ends the proof that grace
cannot lead to sin; and, I repeat it, the proof is just this,
—that grace gives a new life, and that having received
this, our very profession at the commencement of our
Christian course, our very baptism, testifies against living
in the flesh; for baptism is the profession of the *death*
of the flesh, and how can a *dead man live*?

Such is Baptism, the profession of our being "*buried
with Christ.*" Now let me ask, who can make this pro-
fession? Can the unbelieving world make it?—clearly
not. Can, then, unconscious infants make this profession
of death and resurrection with Christ? Is the fact of
being born in England, or born of Christian parents, any
proof that you are "begotten again to a lively hope by
the resurrection of Jesus?" You answer that you are dis-
posed to think that infant baptism is a nonentity, yet you
cannot get over circumcision. Come then, let us look at it.

The Old Testament Church was an earthly thing,
composed of the natural seed of Abraham, and to be
born in Abraham's family entitled a man to all the privi-
leges of that dispensation: but the New Testament Church
is heavenly, composed of the spiritual seed of Abraham,
—"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed,"—
and to be "born of God" entitles a man to all the privi-
leges of this dispensation. In the Old dispensation God
was dealing with man in the flesh, and "meats and drinks

and divers washings and *carnal* ordinances," (Heb. ix, 10,) "and a *worldly* sanctuary," (Heb. ix, 1,) were permitted by God just to prove that the flesh could never be improved, to shew that "the flesh profiteth nothing," that "flesh is flesh;" (John vi, 63.—iii, 6;) all that was then attempted, as far as dispensation went, was "the *purifying* of the flesh." But now, mark the difference, the Church is a "heavenly" thing, (Heb. iii, 1; Eph. ii, 6; Phil. iii, 20,) "begotten again by the resurrection," (1 Pet. i, 3,) and as such "risen with Christ:" (Col. iii, 1;) and therefore "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," as it once was, (Rom. xiv, 17,) but a "new creature;" (2 Cor. v, 17; Gal. vi, 15;) for just as it is true that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," so is it equally true that "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John iii, 6.) Under the Old dispensation, circumcision was the outward ordinance of admission into the Church, and this ordinance, true to the purpose of the dispensation, typified "*the putting away of the filth of the flesh*;" (1 Pet. iii, 21;) for the attempt was still to improve the flesh, "to sanctify to the purifying of the flesh." (Heb. ix, 13.) Under the New Testament, baptism is the outward ordinance for admission, and this ordinance also, true to the purpose of its dispensation, is the emblem of "*the death of the flesh*." (Rom. vi, 6, 11.) "Putting away the filth of the flesh" is not enough now; for it has been already proved that "flesh is flesh," that "all flesh is grass," (1 Pet. i, 24,) and that "in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." (Rom. vii, 18.) In Christ therefore God has brought in the new creation, resurrection work: the flesh, the old man, is now given up as hopelessly bad; and what God has done with it is to put it into Christ's grave; and consequently the word now is "mortify," not "purify"; (compare Col. iii, 5 and Heb. ix, 13;) "*Mortify* therefore your members," and "ye have been *buried* with Christ." Henceforth "As Christ was raised, so we should walk," a heavenly people, "partakers of the heavenly calling," "having our conversation in heaven," and "our life hid with Christ in God." (Heb. iii, 1; Phil. iii, 20; Col. iii, 3.)

But let me trace this analogy yet a little further. Un-

der the Old dispensation, if Abraham had a son born in the flesh, they were at once to circumcise him. Under the New dispensation, if Abraham has a son born in the Spirit, "*for if ye be Christ's ye are Abraham's seed,*" then we are at once to baptize him. But just as of old, a child could not be circumcised before it came into the world, for it could not receive the sign of "*putting away the filth of the flesh*" until the flesh was born; so a babe in Christ cannot rightly be baptized before it comes into heavenly places, for we cannot receive the token of *the flesh having been buried* until we are manifested to be regenerate. And just as of old the child of Abraham was circumcised, though by reason of infancy it knew nothing of the meaning of the rite; so now the babe in Christ, the spiritual infant, is baptized, though by reason of its spiritual infancy it knows but little of the meaning of the ordinance. The one great question in either case is just this,—*Is there life?*—Abraham's natural life in the one case, Abraham's spiritual life in the other?

Now you must, I think, see at once from this, that though natural birth in the flesh could put a man into a dispensation in which God was dealing with the flesh, where there was "*a worldly sanctuary,*" and "*carnal ordinances;*" yet birth in the flesh has nothing to do with "*the kingdom of heaven,*" (see Matt. xiii.) that is, the Gospel dispensation. Accordingly, when the new dispensation was coming in, we find it said, "John the Baptist was the greatest of those *born of women,*" and who as such found themselves in the church: "*but he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" (Matt. xi, 11.) The "*new creature in Christ*" is the only life God now recognizes; such as are "*born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;*" (John i, 13;) "*wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh:* yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more." (2 Cor. v, 16.) Christ "*after the flesh* was of the seed of David, but declared to be the Son of God with power *by the resurrection;*" (Rom. i, 4.) and as such alone we can now know Him, "*being begotten again to a lively hope by His resurrection.*" (1 Pet. i, 3.)

Baptism therefore is (as the Church of England rightly enough says,) "the badge of our profession." By it we profess the death of the flesh in Christ crucified: by it we profess the new life of the Spirit in Christ risen. No one has a right to make this profession, and no one can properly and truly make it, who has not got a better life than the life of Adam; in a word, no one has a right to be baptized who is not regenerate. If I go and bury my natural life when I have no other life within me, then I bury all I have. But not so the Christian, and Christians alone should be baptized. The Christian has a better life, and having it he can afford to give up and mortify "the old man;" and this he does in profession according to Christ's institution in baptism. Just as the Lord's supper is the profession of our communion with Christ, "the cup is the communion of His blood," (1 Cor. x, 16,) by which blood we are cleansed;—so baptism is the profession of our death and resurrection with Christ our head. See this clearly, and then "buried with Him by baptism," and similar passages, will no more puzzle you than those other simple words, "this is my body." In neither case is the outward ordinance the reality, but it is our profession of communion with the reality, and being such is spoken of as above.

There are many other thoughts in connection with this subject which I should like to bring before you, but it is time that I should conclude this already lengthened letter. My joy is that the same Spirit which taught me is your teacher, and if you are a member of Christ, will He not teach you?

But you have some doubt whether you are one of His members? Is it so? Well then listen—"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God;" "we are all the children of God by faith,"—(by nothing else,)—"and if children then heirs." Do you then believe? If so, you are as safe as the love of the God of love can make you,—as safe as Christ; for "as He is, so are we in this world."

How surely then may you draw upon His love to teach you. If "he that provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith,

and is worse than an infidel," (1 Tim. v,) will God not provide for His own?—will He be worse than an infidel? If "the fathers ought to lay up for the children, and not the children for the fathers," (2 Cor. xii,) will not the Father of mercies do as much? "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts," shall not the Good One be as gracious? O trust Him for teaching, and remember, "If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light."

I have no room to add more except my earnest prayer, "*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledye of Him; that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe,* ACCORDING TO THE WORKING OF HIS MIGHTY POWER WHICH HE WROUGHT IN CHRIST WHEN HE RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD." May you so know this "power of His resurrection and the accompanying fellowship of His sufferings, that you may at last attain to the resurrection from the dead." Amen.

Ever very affectionately yours,

A. J.

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