



The Truth about Baptism

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Baptism.

AT the time of my conversion to God, I was privileged to form the acquaintance of four young men, all believers in the Lord Jesus. We were in the habit of spending one night together every week, for united prayer and reading of the Word of God. These were happy seasons, and under God's blessing, many precious truths were thus unfolded to our souls. Reading the Scriptures together one evening, we came across the subject of baptism, and, much to our astonishment, it became manifest that we were not all of one mind about it. One thought the Scriptures clearly taught that believers, and believers only, ought to be baptized, and that the proper form of baptism was by immersion. Another believed that infant sprinkling was the right thing, while the third was of opinion that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was the only essential baptism, and that it did not matter much, which of the two forms of water baptism was adopted, if any, as it was only an outward sign. I had personally no mind on the matter. I had not thought much about it; but I suggested that, rather than introduce a subject of discord into our midst, it would be better to let the matter of baptism drop altogether, and if we should come across

it again in our searching of the Scriptures, to pass it over, leaving each free to hold his own opinion. This, for the time, seemed a satisfactory way out of the difficulty; yet somehow we were not able to steer clear of the subject of baptism from that time onward. It would come up again and again, even when we were not looking for it, or in fact wanting to see it, and although we endeavoured to keep it out of court according to our arrangement, it became more and more apparent to all of us that this was a very unsatisfactory way of getting rid of the matter. We had learned in some measure to value the Word of God as our Guide, and to accept its teachings as the only authority in things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Yet, here we were, of divided opinion, on a subject, concerning which God had clearly something to say, and yet we were unwilling, or afraid, to examine His Word, lest unpleasantness should arise amongst us. Of course we were aware that Christians generally, like ourselves, were much divided about baptism; that this had been so for hundreds of years, and that able and devoted Christians, were to be found on opposite sides in the controversy. Even this did not give us entire satisfaction. If God had spoken about baptism, surely it was possible for us to know what He had said, unless He had departed from His ordinary way, and left the subject of baptism in obscurity. At any rate, we felt it impossible to shelve the matter any

longer. God had said something about baptism, in His Word, that was certain, and we felt ourselves responsible to find out what He had said, and to allow His sayings to enlighten us. We resolved therefore, that we would each separately, and prayerfully, search the Word of God for a week, on the subject, carefully jotting down all the passages in which baptism is mentioned, afterwards arranging them in the following manner. First, as to the **Subject** of baptism: then the **Mode** of baptism; and after that, the **Meaning** of baptism. At the same time, we agreed, to obtain whatever help we could, from Concordances, Lexicons, Commentaries, and Church History to enable us to ascertain the proper meaning of words, and the practice of the Church in early times.

We had a busy week, and on the occasion of our next united meeting, we had each a considerable compilation of Scripture testimony on the subject, which, in the fear of God, we proceeded to compare and examine. I will endeavour to give here a brief resume of what these papers contained; of that evening's conversation, and its results, because I think we may thus be able to examine the subject of baptism, in a simple and straight forward manner, and at the same time, to raise and dispose of the common difficulties that present themselves to many, in connection with it.

We began by reading—

The Lord's Command for Baptism

as found in the commission given by Him to His disciples, before His ascension into Heaven. "Go ye therefore, and teach (or "make disciples of" margin) all nations, baptizing them in 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" (Matt. 28. 19-20). Then in Mark 16. 15 we read, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

The former of these Scriptures is the Lord's own command to the preacher, the latter to the convert. They are both co-extensive with the command to preach the Gospel, and make disciples, and clearly while the one continues, so should the other. There is no hint given that baptism might be given up, while the making of disciples continues, or that the order should be reversed, or the subjects changed. What the Lord said to His servants then, is His command for His servants still; and it is their responsibility, whenever a sinner is brought to Christ, to receive Him as his Saviour and to own Him as his Lord, first to baptize him and then to teach him "all things" commanded by the Lord. In Mark, the word is to the receiver of the Gospel, the one believing in the Lord Jesus. After believing, he is to be baptized, and if the preacher

fails to set before him the truth, yet his responsibility to obey it remains. This will be sufficient authority for water baptism, to all those who accept the Word of God as their Guide Book, and it will, at the same time, answer the objections of those who speak of baptism as a thing of no account, "a carnal ordinance," and a "non-essential of Christianity." Strange it must appear to such, if they ever think, that the Son of God should have coupled with the preaching of the Gospel of Salvation—the grandest message earth will ever hear—"a thing of no account," and that those men who were sent forth on the glorious mission of making disciples, should be called upon to impose upon them "a meaningless ordinance," and a "non-essential of Christianity" at the earliest stage of their Christian life. Yet this is exactly what the reasonings of those who reject baptism amount to, no matter how they clothe them. We gather then, that the Lord's command for baptism is unassailable, and that it abides unrepealed to the present hour. We next examined our papers to find—

A Command for Infant Baptism.

But not one was there. In all our searching of the Word, we had not come across a single text commanding the baptism of infants. This was significant. Surely, if the Lord had intended that infants should be baptized, He would have said so. If He has said nothing whatever about it, we are not at liberty to

add to His Words, or to institute an ordinance in His Name, that He has not appointed.

THE SUBJECTS.

Who are to be Baptised? Believers or Infants?

We next proceeded to examine the Scriptures as to the subjects of Baptism, and on this we found an array of evidence that quite astonished us. In the Lord's commission as recorded in Matt. 28. 19, the order is, first to "make disciples," next to baptise them, and in Mark 16. 16—"He that believeth and is baptized." From this we gather that the subjects of baptism are to be believers; and only believers. The examples recorded in the Acts of the Apostles confirm this. In Acts 2. 41—the first recorded case of baptism after the Lord's commission was given—we read, that "They that gladly received His Word, were baptized." The receiving of the Word preceded baptism. In Chapter 8. 5, the Gospel was carried to the city of Samaria by Philip, and "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" (Acts 8. 12). They believed; they were baptized. The Ethiopian eunuch's conversion is next recorded, immediately followed by his baptism in water (Acts 8. 36-39). The next example is that of Saul of Tarsus, who first met the Lord on the way to Damascus, and was afterwards

addressed by Ananias as "Brother Saul" and by him baptized as a believer. The Gospel was then preached by Peter to the Gentiles (Acts 10. 34-43). Cornelius and those with Him heard the Word, received the Holy Ghost, and were baptized in the Name of the Lord (verses 44, 48). It is interesting here to note that the possession of the Holy Ghost did not set aside their baptism in water, but was the reason given by Peter for proceeding with it. Surely this is sufficient answer to those who boast that "the baptism of the Spirit" is the only baptism, and that baptism in water is unnecessary. In chap. 16. 13-15, we have the baptism of Lydia, "whose heart the Lord opened," and her house, and in the same chapter, the baptism of the jailor of Philippi and his house. When the Gospel was preached by Paul at Corinth, "many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18. 8). They heard, they believed, they were baptized. At Ephesus, twelve men, disciples of John, who had been baptised before they heard the Gospel, were baptised in the Name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19. 5), an answer surely to those who maintain that baptism in infancy before conversion, is equivalent to the baptism of believers after it. From these examples, recorded in the Word of God for our instruction, we gather that the proper and only subjects for baptism are believers, and we look in vain in the Word of God to find a single instance of the baptism of an infant.

The Baptism of Households.

It is sometimes urged by those who contend for infant baptism—in fact it is their principal argument—that we are told in Scripture that whole households were baptized and that there may have been infants in these households. To say the least, this is a very slender foundation to build upon. When men are driven to seek their authority for infant baptism in a “supposition,” it shows how hard up they are for “proof.” Yet it seems to satisfy the conscience of many, and they take it for granted, that the baptism of certain households conclusively proves that infants were baptized. Let us see. There are three households said to have been baptized, and God has told us somewhat definitely of what they were composed. He has not left us to guess. There was the house of the jailor of Philippi. We are told that Paul and Silas spake unto him the word of the Lord, “and to all that were in his house” (Acts 16. 32), and that “he rejoiced believing in God with all his house” (v. 24). They all heard, they all believed, they were all baptized. So that if there was an infant, it was a hearing and believing one, and a proper subject for baptism. (2) There was “the house of Stephanas” (1 Cor. 1.16) baptized by Paul, and in 1 Cor. 16. 15, it is said they “addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.” Babies do not usually minister; they need to be ministered unto. (3) There is the house of Lydia (Acts 16. 15), and this

has always been the stronghold of the advocates of infant baptism. "Lydia's baby" is their principal witness. But there are quite a number of things we have to "suppose" here. First, that she was married—if she was—where was her husband, and why was she in business on her own account as a seller of purple? Then we have to "suppose" that she had a family, and brought it with her from Thyatira to Philippi, a distance of over three hundred miles! All this is pure speculation: the Book says nothing about it. What it does say is, that there were "brethren" in the house of Lydia, who were comforted by Paul and Silas, before they departed (Acts 16. 40). Thus God overturns the whole, by telling us that in the house of Lydia were "brethren," a name given only to believers.

The Testimony of Honest Men

who are regarded as able expositors, ancient and modern, we find fully confirm us in this. Here is their testimony. Luther asserts:—"It cannot be proved that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or by the first Christians after Christ." Calvin says:—"It is nowhere expressed by the evangelists that infants were baptized." Erasmus, who wrote in Luther's day, says—"It is nowhere expressed in the Apostles' writings that they baptized children." Jeremy Taylor testifies—"It is against the perpetual analogy of Christ's doctrine, to baptize infants." Professor Moses Stuart

says—"Commands, or plain and certain examples, relative to it in the New Testament, I do not find."

The History of Infant Baptism.

It may be naturally asked, how comes it that infant baptism, concerning which the Scriptures give neither command or example, has come to be so extensively practised, by almost every sect in Christendom? The answer to this is very simple. It was originated, along with other innovations, when men began to lay aside the Word of God, and substitute their own traditions in its place. It was introduced at a time when the very foundations of the Gospel were being frittered away, and when the wretched theory of baptismal regeneration was made to supplant the fundamental doctrine of the new Birth. Neander, the Church Historian, informs us, that when "the notion of a magical influence, or charm, connected with the Sacraments" gained ground, infant baptism was necessarily introduced. It owes its origin to the African Church, which at the same time "introduced infant communion: giving wine to children incapable of taking bread." The "charm" of Infant Baptism was, that it was supposed to eradicate original sin, followed by Penance for the removal of actual sin. Then Purgatory completed the purification after death. This is the doctrine of the Church of Rome. The Church of England, in "the Prayer Book,

plainly declares that in Baptism an infant is made "a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven." The Presbyterian "Shorter Catechism" says that the baptism of infants "signifies and seals our ingrafting into Christ." Are these things so? Are all who have been "sprinkled" in infancy "ingrafted into Christ?" Do they even profess to be?

THE MODE OF BAPTISM.

Is it by Sprinkling, or by Immersion?

There is no serious difficulty as to the Scriptural mode of baptism. All intelligent readers and students of the Bible—those who practise infant sprinkling included—admit that the original mode of baptism was by immersion. It would be impossible to arrive at any other conclusion, from the testimony of Scripture. The Greek word "Baptizo," which occurs some eighty times in the New Testament, means—"to dip"—"to immerse." Had our translators put in into English, they could not have represented it by any other term, certainly not by "sprinkling." But then, if the translators of 1611 had translated the Greek word "Baptizo" into the English word "immerse," that would have upset the practice of the Church, and King James had given them distinct instructions not to do that, by their translation. So these good men being unable to honestly translate "Baptizo" "to sprinkle,"

resolved not to translate it at all, but to change the "o" into an "e," and thus Englify the untranslated word. And so we have the anomaly of a Greek word in an English form, standing here and there in our New Testament: a perpetual witness to the traditions of men. The testimony of scholars of all sections of the professing Church bears witness to this. Dean Stanley—a leading light in the Church of England, and Dean of Westminster, says—"It was an entire submersion in deep water. The meaning of the word is, that those who were baptized, were plunged submerged, immersed, in water." Dr. Chalmers, of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland says—"The original meaning of the word baptism is immersion. The prevalent style of the administration in the Apostles' days, was by an actual submerging of the whole body under water." John Wesley, commenting on Romans 6. says—"The allusion is to the ancient mode of baptizing by immersion." These are valuable testimonies from men whose scholarship none can question, and who themselves practised the sprinkling of infants. The Scripture examples clearly show that immersion was the practice of the early Church. Concerning the eunuch's baptism we read—"And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water" (Acts 8. 38-39). Of the baptism of the Lord Himself it is written "Jesus when He was baptized went

up straightway out of the water" (Matt. 3. 16). For 1300 years sprinkling was unknown. In 1559, it was introduced to Scotland by John Knox, on his return from Geneva, and from Scotland it made its way to England, in the days of Queen Elizabeth. And how did it find a place in the Westminster Confession? That also has a history. "The Westminster Assembly discussed in 1643, the question of baptism. 24 voted for immersion; 24 for sprinkling. The Chairman, Dr. Lightfoot, gave his casting vote for sprinkling": and so sprinkling went down in the Westminster standards as baptism, and people receive and act upon it, as if it had come there by direct commandment from Heaven: whereas it was by the vote of man, and by a majority of one. People are better to know the foundations on which they build, and surely this one must be admitted to be slender.

The Scriptures, which are usually brought forward to

Prove Infant Baptism

we next examined. The first and chief of these is 1 Cor. 7. 14. It reads—"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." There is not a word about these children being baptized. Yet this is what has been pressed into the passage, by those who want Scripture for sprinkling infants. But, as

Dean Stanley says of the passage, it "is conclusive against the practice of infant baptism." The children are "holy," in the same sense as the unconverted husband is said to be "sanctified," and only in that sense. They do not become Christians on account of their parents' faith; they need to be "born again," as others. Until they are, they cannot be baptized as believers; and there is no command for baptizing unbelievers, old or young, in the Word of God. If you say this sanctions the baptism of the children of believing parents—"infants of such as are members of the visible church"—then, so it does the unconverted husbands of believing wives, and the food that believers eat (1 Tim. 4. 5), for these also are "sanctified" in the same sense exactly as the children are holy. Why not baptize them also? There is the same authority for the one as for the other.

It has been said by others, that "baptism came in the place of circumcision," and that as every man-child born of Israelitish parents was circumcised, so every child of Christian parents ought to be baptized? But where is the proof in support of this assertion? As a matter of fact, baptism did not come in the place of circumcision, for Timothy was circumcised long after baptism had come (Acts 16. 3), and so strong were some in favour of it, that "the apostles, elders; and brethren" of the church of Jerusalem had to come together to consider the question of circumcision

being forced upon converted Gentiles, as necessary to their salvation. If baptism had come in place of circumcision, that would have been the time to say so, and finish the controversy. But there is not a word about baptism. Moreover, the analogy fails. A Jewish man-child received circumcision, as a sign, as soon as he entered the family by natural birth. The order was birth first, then circumcision; and so it is now. First, regeneration, or spiritual birth, then baptism; but to make the analogy teach baptism before conversion, you must circumcise the Jewish child before it is born, and even then the baby girls would not be baptized at all. The irresistible conclusion to which we were forced was, that the Scriptures that are supposed to teach that infants were baptized, do not teach anything of the kind, but exactly the opposite.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM.

We further gathered from the study of the Epistles that the baptism of believers by immersion is a typical ordinance, and not a meaningless ceremony. In being buried under the waters of baptism, the believer shows forth in figure, his death and burial with Christ (Rom. 6. 4), his separation from the world (Col. 2. 12-20), and his end as a sinner in the flesh (Gal. 2. 20). In being raised up out of this mystic grave, he confesses his resurrection with Christ to newness of life (Rom. 6.

5-9); his part in a new creation (2 Cor. 5. 17), and his desire henceforth as a risen saint to seek things above (Col. 3. 1). When the meaning of this great typical ordinance became clear to us from the written Word, it was not difficult to see why Satan had so constantly and continuously sought to pervert it, and to supplant it by a counterfeit. The death and resurrection of Christ was the defeat and utter destruction of Satan's kingdom, and full well he knows that when the Christian lays hold of this great truth by faith, and reckons with God about it, he also practically passes beyond his power. Baptism is the divinely-appointed "likeness," given to the believer by his God, to keep alive the power of this great truth experimentally in him, and to enable him to practically give effect to it in all his relations to men and things down here. As the light of this shone into our minds, and the power of it began to move our hearts, the whole subject of baptism stood forth before us, in all the brightness and beauty of that which it expressed, and the traditional and meaningless thing called "Infant Baptism"—for which we had failed to find a single Scripture command or example—for ever lost its claim to our obedience, or even our respect. Never before did it appear so hideous in its deformity, as it did that hour, in the light of the Heaven-sent reality. We bowed our knees in thanksgiving to our God, and with His words on our lips "I esteem all thy precepts

Baptism

concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way” (Psalm 119. 128), we arose and forthwith we were buried with Christ in Baptism. Of course the world was angry, even some of our friends and fellow-believers thought we had gone wrong, but we had the testimony that we were pleasing God, and time has confirmed that “the statutes of the Lord are right” and that in “keeping of them there is great reward.”

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