

WHAT BAPTISM IS,
AND
WHO SHOULD BE BAPTISED.

THIRD EDITION, REVISED.

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

The Author, having received very many assurances of the help derived by reading this Pamphlet, and the demand for it continuing, is encouraged to issue a Third Edition, trusting it may still prove helpful to many through God's blessing.

WHAT BAPTISM IS, AND WHO SHOULD BE BAPTISED.

IT is well to remember that this is a time of confusion and difficulty, when much that at the beginning was clearly understood, is not now so readily apprehended, but often involves the giving up of many long-cherished thoughts and beliefs which have been instilled into the mind perhaps from childhood.

Besides this, there is ever a tendency to go to extremes ; and many on discovering that what they had received and held was wrong, and that men had perverted and abused what God had given, have gone to an opposite extreme, and given up what is right in itself, though connected in the systems of men with what is wrong. I believe this accounts for much of the difficulty as to baptism.

The only safe way is to take up the scriptures without seeking to uphold what we prefer, or may have been holding, perhaps very tenaciously, and seek to ascertain what their teaching is in reference to baptism.

4 *What Baptism is, and Who should be Baptised.*

In the first place, then, let us enquire what baptism is.

We shall see as we go on that it is *not* the obedience of a Christian to a command. How often one hears it said: "We have the plain command of scripture, 'Believe and be baptised;'" this is the stronghold of many, and yet there is no such expression in the Word, nor indeed any command to be baptised. The command in Matthew xxviii. is to the apostles, to "disciple all nations, baptising them, &c.;" and in Mark xvi. to "preach the gospel to every creature," and then a statement by the Lord as to the consequences to all who heard it. This is very different from a command *to be baptised*; being the Lord's *instructions to His apostles*: though at the same time establishing baptism on His authority.

I would add here, that to set forth baptism as being a command to one already a Christian, in the manner referred to, is entirely unscriptural, and destroys the true idea of baptism altogether. It is bringing into Christianity the legal principle of obedience to ordinances, and genders to bondage; it is, in fact, entirely opposed to the spirit of Christianity.

Again, baptism is not a sign or public confession that we are already dead and risen with Christ; scripture nowhere says so, nor does it anywhere state that baptism is a sign or symbol of something previously true of the person baptised.

Turning now to what it *is*, we find, in the first

place, that scripture presents it to us as reception on to Christian ground, or position on earth, from amongst Jews or Gentiles.† It constitutes the person baptised a Christian *as to his position here on earth*, and introduces him into the outward privileges of Christianity.

The 2nd of Acts proves this clearly, and we will now consider it. The Apostle, by the Holy Ghost, had just been bringing home to the Jews their guilt in the murder of their Messiah. They had rejected the One in whom all the promises and blessings were centred, and now, instead of being in a position of privilege, are proved to be under guilt and condemnation. As this is brought vividly before them, many of them are truly convicted, and cry out "What shall we do?" From Peter's reply we may plainly gather the meaning and purpose of baptism. First he says "repent," *i.e.*, to judge themselves and the guilty position they occupied before God as identified with the apostate nation, and next, be received into an entirely new position; and this evidently by baptism, as he adds, "and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

† I do not speak of John's baptism here, which was quite distinct from Christian baptism, though in principle much the same. *That* was connected with, and constituted, a professedly repentant Remnant inside Judaism; *this*, with a Remnant separated *by it* from Judaism, to which others from amongst the Gentiles were afterwards added, and by it marked off as Christians.

6 *What Baptism is, and Who should be Baptised.*

To quote this as a proof that baptism is a command is to propound the error that a sinner receives forgiveness by obedience to an ordinance, which is false doctrine, for clearly they were sinners whom the apostle was addressing.

We must remember that in their minds judgment and blessing were associated with God's government on the earth ; and what they were awakened to was, that their position was no longer one of favour and blessing, but of guilt and condemnation in the government of God, and they desired to escape from it. But how were they to do so, and to what new position could they be brought ?

Two chief points in Peter's discourse make this clear, namely, the exaltation of Christ and the coming down of the Holy Ghost. He says, in verse 36, "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." There was no longer to be forgiveness of sins in Judaism, or in connection with their sacrifices, nor was the Holy Spirit given to the Jews *as such*. All this was outside them completely, for their Messiah had been rejected and crucified by them, but raised up and made Lord of all. The only way for a Jew now to escape being identified with the nation and sharing its judgment was by being received into Christianity. Peter urges, in verse 40, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Notice what they are here told to save themselves *from*. Notice also verse 39, which is

closely connected with verse 38, and indeed forms part of Peter's reply to their enquiry : "What shall we do?"

It may be well to remark that chapter iii. presents a different character of blessing to chapter ii., and, as it helps to the understanding of both to notice this difference, we will briefly refer to it.

There, too, the guilt of the nation is pressed on them, but they are addressed *as a nation*, and called to repent *as such*, and told that God would send Jesus, &c. ; whereas in chapter ii. it is that the Holy Ghost had been given, and Jesus exalted on high, and made both Lord and Christ ; a new order of things, as we have already noticed, outside the nation as such, and in connection with which we have repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, and also the exhortation, "Save yourselves *from* this untoward generation."

But it may be said that baptism is only thus used in connection with the Jews and their special guilt ; we will therefore now consider the case of Cornelius and his company (Acts x.), who were Gentiles, and we can hardly fail to see that it is used with the same thought and for the same purpose, namely, receiving ostensibly into the circle of Christian privileges those who were outside it ; and the means of reception is the same for the Gentile as for the Jew. It is not a question of nationality, nor age, but of the object of baptism, and where it brings those who are the subjects of it.

Cornelius and his friends had received the Holy

Ghost (and were therefore, as to the state of their souls, in a very different condition from those in Acts ii.), and it is because Peter sees this that he cannot refuse their admission to the position and privileges of Christianity. This is the force of his remark to his companions of the circumcision, "Can anyone forbid water that these should not be baptised, &c.?"

Clearly baptism was connected with privilege in his mind, or else his words have no meaning; but it was not admission to the privileges of Judaism, or he would have said: "Can anyone forbid circumcision?"

Thus, I may say, baptism supersedes circumcision, as Christianity supersedes Judaism.

Here, again, it is not the obedience to a command by those baptised, but the reception of persons whom Peter saw ought to be received. God had already owned them and given them the greatest gift, making no difference between them and the circumcision, and thus the way to their reception was clear; Peter owns it, and says in substance to those with him (for his remarks and directions are addressed to his companions of the circumcision), "bring them in, they ought not to be kept outside;" and this they did by baptising them.*

* *Note.*—In the case of Cornelius and those with him, being the first Gentiles received into Christianity, we find God acting sovereignly and giving the Holy Spirit first, fully convincing Peter thereby, and overcoming his national prejudice.

In these instances it is quite clear there was no thought of giving a public or private testimony that they were dead and risen with Christ ; for who would say it was true of those in Acts ii. ? And what did Cornelius and his friends know of this truth, which was only taught by Paul long afterwards ?

But again, baptism is “unto Christ”—not Christ as Messiah on earth, but exalted after going into death. God has made Him Lord and Christ, and this is owned by baptism. This owning of Christ as Lord is only done in connection with the profession of Christianity during this present dispensation or church period. The Jews rejected and reject Him still ; the Gentiles were outside everything positionally and sunk in idolatry ; both were enemies to God and guilty before Him ; both, too, had united in rejecting and crucifying Christ ; but God had raised Him up and glorified Him, and sent down the Holy Ghost to witness of Him. Thus Jesus is Lord of all, and baptism is always *to* Him as Lord (see 1st Corinthians x., “baptised *to* Moses”), and the one baptised is brought where His authority is acknowledged, and, as baptised *to* Him, is responsible to own it practically.

Where there is no work in the soul, there will not be loyalty to Him ; that, however, is not the point we are now considering, but what baptism is and does for those who are the subjects of it. It is “unto Christ.”

It is also “unto His death,” Romans vi., verse 3. Not *into* His death, but *unto* it. It is only by His death we can have what is presented and enjoyed in Christianity. Therefore the apostle goes on, in Romans vi., to say, “We are buried with Him by baptism unto death.” Thus (we are learning from scripture) baptism is burial to death—not a figure that I have been buried, but “buried with Him by baptism.” It does not say risen by baptism, but “buried . . . unto death”; Colossians ii. says the same, but, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost is there setting forth the believer as dead and risen with Christ, he adds “in which (or, in whom) also ye are risen with Him through faith of the working of God, who raised Him from among the dead.” Here we have *faith* in the operation of God, and being raised *through it*, but burial by baptism.

Romans does not look at believers as risen with Christ at all; so that to quote Romans vi., as is so often done, as a proof that baptism is a symbol of being dead and risen with Christ, is—along with the rest—ignorance of the scope of the epistle.

Next, baptism is “putting on Christ.” Galatians iii., verse 27, states this definitely. It is not by faith, but by baptism that Christ is put on. The previous verse puts faith in its proper connection, “Ye are all,” etc.; and these two verses must not be confounded together, as though they conveyed one and the same idea, or else the point and force of both are destroyed. When rightly understood they help much to a proper

conception of what baptism is, and its scriptural idea and place, and prove further what has been already advanced—that baptism is connected with our *outward* place on earth ; while faith has to do with the state of the soul before God, and our relationship to Him and to heaven—to what is unseen and eternal. With these baptism has nothing whatever to do. §

The Galatians were going back to law, which was only again bringing them into bondage—into the place of servants ; the Holy Ghost, therefore, presses on them that they are sons—not servants, “Ye are all the *sons*” (not children here) “of God by faith in Jesus Christ,” not by baptism nor in any way connected with it. “You are sons by faith, what do you want to be servants for?” is the force of the apostle’s reasoning. He then goes to their baptism, and says, as it were, “You have put on Christ by your baptism (*as many* as were baptised), what do you want to put on Moses for?” They were outwardly identified with Christ by their baptism—had put Him on. Just as of old Israel were baptised to Moses in the cloud and in the sea. *All* were baptised to him—men, women, and children—and therefore outwardly connected with him, and under his authority. How they might act

§ A Ritualist has his children baptised in view of their death, so that they may thereby be fit for heaven. An intelligent believer has his family baptised in view of their living here on earth, and, as responsible to bring them up in the faith of Christ, outwardly separating them to Him by baptism.

afterwards was another thing, and whether they had faith or not remained for the wilderness to prove.

This epistle is written to those who had faith, but the point now before us is not whether they had faith or not when baptised, but what their baptism was—"putting on Christ," not a sign they had put Him on previously.

In Romans xiii. we have, "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," which is quite another thing. It is what those at Rome are exhorted to do, though they had been baptised previously and therefore had "put on Christ," according to Galatians iii., 27. But in Romans xiii. it is the practical manifestation of Him (hence his full name) in our walk here on earth.

A person may put on the regimentals and be a traitor at heart, and opposed to the spirit of the captain; but he is always responsible as one who has put them on, and stands on a different ground from those who were never thus professedly put under subjection to the captain.

In connection with this, I would refer to 1st Corinthians xv., 29, a verse perplexing to many. The figure here used is of an army exposed to the attack of the enemy, who were cutting them down—killing them; yet others constantly stepping in and filling up their places in the ranks.* The apostle asks, as it were, "What's the benefit of doing so if there be no resurrection? better be out of the army,

* See also note on Page 35.

better not put on the regimentals at all, but enjoy the world—"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But the verse proves that their baptism put them in this place—connected them with Christ, and separated them professedly from the world—they had put on Christ. We shall see afterwards how this applies to the families of Christians.

I now go on to 1st Peter iii., where it is said "baptism doth now save us," and this requires our careful examination.

We must remember that here, as elsewhere, we are not getting an exposition by the apostle of what baptism is, but it is brought in by the way in connection with the subject before him, because it relates to that subject. We must first see what the subject is where the reference occurs, or else we shall be making it of private interpretation.

In Peter's epistles the government of God, the various effects of that government, and the subjects of it, are brought before us.

In the 1st epistle it is His government in connection with the righteous, and in the 2nd as regards the wicked. We have not there the truth of the believer being dead and risen with Christ, though the above passage has sometimes been quoted to justify this view, but it is always thus when persons seek to make scripture conform to their views, instead of letting their views be formed by scripture.

The epistle is written to believing *Jews*, whose minds were formed by God's known ways in government on the earth, who were familiar with them, and were accustomed to look for blessing, peace, and deliverance *on earth* as the portion of the righteous—of those who acted with a good conscience. Now they had become Christians with a good conscience, in the full confidence that it was God's mind that they should treat Judaism as apostate and condemned, no longer subject to His favour, but with His wrath hanging over those still in it; that is, wrath on earth under His government, of which we have an example in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus. It was a national thing, involving their families as well as themselves, even as they had said—"His blood be on us, and *on our children*."

But though, as Peter says, "Baptism doth now save us," this was not so apparent to them, as they were enduring persecution and suffering from their own nation and others; hence they were perplexed, and their good conscience* demanded the explanation—"Why is this?"

In chapter iii. Peter alludes to these sufferings, and then refers to their baptism, which had separated them outwardly from the nation, and saved them from the governmental wrath and judgment to which we have

* Note here the difference between a *good* conscience and a *purged* conscience, a most necessary distinction for understanding this scripture.

alluded, bringing them into the place where the forgiveness of sins was known, and the power of the Holy Ghost manifest. He then seeks to encourage them in this position, and shews them how the circumstances they were in were consistent with their present place and connection with Christ, during the time in which God was waiting in long-suffering with the unrepentant ; for, though judgment was sure for those who remained so, yet God was now showing His long-suffering through them. While God was thus waiting, these righteous ones (though going through suffering under God's governmental ways) need not fear being overwhelmed by judgment, as though they were suffering through God's wrath ; for this was not so ; but, as in the case of Noah, who in his day passed through, and was saved through, the flood, and was finally brought beyond it all ; so they, though now suffering in the government of God, had the assurance in and by the resurrection of Christ of complete deliverance out of all they were then passing through, which had come upon them since their separation from Judaism, by baptism.

They had thus escaped, and been saved from, the wrath and judgment of the nation, and had been identified with Him, who, having passed through suffering and death, had been raised up from the dead, and all power given to Him. The case of the flood is thus brought in as an instance, both of the long-suffering of God, when the spirit of Christ (by Noah) preached

to those whose spirits are now in prison, and as exhibiting God's wrath and judgment on the unrepentant, as also the salvation of the righteous (and of his family in the government of God). But these were saved through water, which was the instrument of ruin and death to the others.

In that case, the water of the flood came on *all* at the same time and Noah was saved *through* it. In the time when Peter was writing, while the principles of God's government were the same, yet the righteous were going through the trial *before* the judgment fell on the ungodly, and during the time of His long-suffering with these ; but, though thus suffering and tried, they need not fear as though it were wrath from God ; they might rest assured of full and final deliverance from all ; even as Noah was saved through water, "the like figure, whereunto baptism doth also now save us . . . by the resurrection of Christ."* What encouragement and assurance there was for these suffering Jewish believers in all this ! The righteous were *saved through* the trials and sufferings of God's governmental ways (which is the meaning of the expression—"if the righteous scarcely be saved"), but when all this was over, and their deliverance *out* of all the difficulties was accomplished, "Where should the ungodly and

* I read the intermediate words in this verse as a parenthesis, in which he gives the negative and positive as to baptism, and I connect "the resurrection of Christ," etc., as given above.

sinner appear?" While God's ways in government may change, the principles of His government abide the same.

They had these principles set before them for their guidance and assurance, though now "judgment must first begin at the House of God"; but the end of God's dealings is the same. The waters of death in Noah's day only lifted him above all, and brought him into a typically new creation; and now for them Christ is raised, and not only so, but "gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." What then need they fear? Here is the answer to every demand of a good conscience—a demand or enquiry resulting from their baptism, which brought them into the place of the suffering about which they were perplexed and required an explanation. Resurrection is the answer to every demand or question.

Before leaving this I would again notice that the epistle is addressed to true believers, who were "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, etc.," and therefore the resurrection was to them more than the witness of mere deliverance from the judgment of the nation *on the earth*; faith looks beyond that and waits for blessing hereafter; they looked for this, for "a salvation ready to be revealed," but needed to be prepared for, and encouraged in, the path of suffering here; suffering because of being identified with Christ,

and suffering for righteousness sake † during the time of God's longsuffering with the ungodly ; all ending in the salvation of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked ; the seal of the former was the resurrection of Christ and His present glory, the seal of the latter they had in God's past judgment—as in Noah's day. But these Christians had nothing to fear, either here or hereafter ; they were not only baptised but were righteous—being believers, and it is important to bear this in mind, and that their baptism is only brought in by the way. The question as to who should be baptised is not raised, nor is it intimated in the passage directly. We have not yet come to that question, but only what baptism is, and does, for those who are the subjects of it.

I now go to Acts xxii., 16. Here we find baptism is washing—the washing away of sins. Clearly this is not a case of the conscience being purged or the soul being saved, or the person being accepted in Christ and His finished work. All this is through faith in His blood : “The blood cleanses from all sin.” I do not wash myself but He washes me (see Rev. i., 5, and 1st Cor. vi., 11, etc.). This is all blessedly true and simple, but the other (Acts xxii.) is true also ; and it is no thought of washing in a figure ; nor a sign, or figure or confession of being already washed, as so many quote and explain it.

† There are various characters of suffering considered in the epistle.

We do not wash a thing as a figure that it is clean, or to confess that it is clean, but to cleanse it.

Saul of Tarsus was a Jew—a bitter enemy of Christ and his people—sharing in the guilt of murdering Stephen, &c. In his blind zeal for Judaism he was a leading opponent of Christianity; but grace overabounded, and brought him down at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth. He revealed Himself in glory to Saul, who was to be a chosen vessel thenceforth. This was God's purpose and He had wrought repentance in him. Ananias is sent to him that he may receive his sight, and the Holy Ghost; but not as a Jew. He must first be brought to where forgiveness of sins was known, and the Holy Ghost was dwelling. He must clear himself of identification with the guilt that was his as a Jew, and a persecutor of Christ, and be brought on Christian ground—become a Christian *as to his place*; and this by baptism.

Until baptised, the guilt and sins that were his accrued to him as to his place on earth, and *in that sense* he was—until baptised—unwashed and unforgiven. Hence baptism, which is a symbol of Christ's death, is that which washes in a governmental way. It was when Paul gave the account of his conversion before the Jews that he relates the above direction given by Ananias; intimating that cleansings and washings connected with their system were no longer of any avail, and that the true course for

any one who wished to be a vessel for God here, was to get clear of that position altogether, owning the lordship of Christ, which is only done in Christianity during the present Church period, and by baptism first of all as that which brings a person on to that ground.

We have now gone over what baptism is, namely, reception into Christianity from either Judaism or Paganism,† to the sphere where Christ's authority is owned, and to the responsibility connected with this place. It is therefore "unto Christ," but if to Him to His death, and is a symbol of it. It is "burial to His death"; Romans vi. states this, it does not say already dead and therefore buried by baptism, but "buried unto death," and following it is responsibility to walk in newness of life. It is owning *His* death, and the one baptised is, by it, buried to His death, as owning that all we are in the flesh must go from before God.

Next it is "putting on Christ," which is connected with His lordship and authority, and positional identification with Him *on earth*; for baptism relates entirely to our position on earth under God's government; and Peter, when speaking of that government, says to those to whom he wrote, "baptism also now saves us by the

† By Paganism is meant all outside Judaism and Christianity; all who are neither circumcised nor baptised.—See Galatians iii., 8, and 1st Corinthians x., 32.

resurrection of Christ." In the same connection baptism is the washing away of sins on earth; for whatever a person may be by faith in Christ, and according to the purpose of God in grace (and where there is faith there is everything for eternity), yet as to God's government on earth he is neither washed nor saved till baptised. He is not a Christian at all as to his ostensible place on earth—but either Jew or Gentile; the former of whom had forfeited all their privileges, and the latter had never acquired any.

The government of God is a subject about which it is very important to be clear; and the principles involved in it, when apprehended, help much to understanding rightly the question of baptism, and indeed much else in scripture. But we must now consider who are the proper subjects for baptism.

In connection with this it is well to notice that, in the cases recorded in scripture, those who were baptised were often in very different circumstances and very different states of soul. We find Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles are all baptised under different circumstances and conditions. No fixed standard is given to be attained by all alike beforehand. No special confession is demanded (for Acts viii. 37 is spurious). In Acts ii. convicted sinners are exhorted to be baptised. In chapter viii. the Samaritans believe the preaching of Philip, and are then baptised, but do not receive the Holy Ghost till

some time after, and so, though brought on to the ground of Christianity by being baptised to Christ, yet were not in "the Body of Christ," which could not be till they received the Holy Ghost (1st Corinthians xii., 13). Again, we have Gentiles, in Acts x., receiving the Holy Ghost prior to baptism (the only instance of it). Saul of Tarsus is first converted, and three days after is baptised and has his sins washed away governmentally, calling on the name of the Lord.

Then we have Lydia—whose heart the Lord opened to the Word—baptised, and not only so, but her house baptised with her, though no such fact is recorded of them as that their hearts were opened; but if this had been true in their case, the Holy Ghost could just as easily have linked them up with her in reference to the work of the Lord in her soul, as in reference to her baptism. Faith is wrought in her soul first; this is the Lord's faithfulness to her. Now she will be baptised, and her whole house with her; all are to be put under the authority or lordship of Christ; this is her faithfulness to Him; for the verse evidently connects faithfulness on her part with her and their baptism, as it says, "*when* she was baptised *and her house*, she said," &c.

Lydia is not only brought on to the ground of Christianity herself, but has her house also brought with her, which was no light thing in that day, when surrounded by enemies of Christianity—both

Jews and Gentiles. It was faithfulness to the Lord on her part.

Lydia's house is a distinct case of baptism without the slightest intimation of any confession on their part, or work of God in them, and had these things been true of them as of her, surely it would have been mentioned, and, besides, verse 15 shows it was Lydia's act so to speak, that is, done on her responsibility. It is household baptism, clearly and simply set forth by scripture, connected with the responsibility and faithfulness (as far as it went) of the head of the house—though a woman.

I know that efforts have been made to explain away the force of this instance of household baptism, that suppositions have been raised, and conclusions arrived at without any ground for them*; generally to the effect that Lydia had no house at all, in the sense in which the word "house" is here used, which usually means family or descendants, as we shall see by looking at the case of the jailer, following this in the same chapter.

The apostle in answer to his inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" at once links his house up with him (see also chapter xi., 14). We then have the word of the Lord spoken "*to all that were in his house,*" a term including more than "his house" in the

* To say that "the brethren" in verse 40 refers to Lydia's household is simply absurd—a foolish effort to set aside this clear and definite case of household baptism.

previous verse. In the next verse baptism comes in, and it is himself and "all his" (not all that were in his house) are said to have been baptised; the distinction between the two is very clear and important.

The jailer would be responsible for the baptism of his house—"all his," but not for others who might be in his house at the time—other jailers, servants, &c. "All his" would include only those for whom he was responsible on account of their relationship to himself, and would, therefore, take in the very youngest child. It may be said there is no proof he had any children, or, at least, young children. I answer, this does not at all affect the point, which is, that "all his" were connected with him in outward blessing and privilege, and therefore were baptised, and what is insisted on is that this principle includes the very youngest child. It was, as we have already shewn, an instance of admitting the house, with the head of it, into the place of privilege. Are they entitled to this on account of their relationship? and if so, they assuredly ought to be baptised; and whether they are adults or infants is not the question, provided they are in the house, and therefore under the authority of the head of it.

The rendering of verse 34 in the authorised version is not quite correct. It is, in the original, "he rejoiced with all his house, he having believed in God."* It was a happy household now that he was saved, and

* The words "having believed in God" are in the singular number, and apply to the jailer only.

turned from idols to serve the living and true God.

Of course, in that day, if persons to whom the gospel was preached did not receive it, they would not be baptised. If they refused Christianity they refused baptism, and if they accepted it, it was by baptism, outwardly.

God alone could see the heart, as to whether there was faith, or (as in the case of Simon Magus) mere profession ; if only the latter, there could be no receiving the Holy Ghost, only the being received into the place where He dwelt, and thus a witness and partaker of His operations (see Hebrews vi).

Nobody amongst us, that I know of, contends for infant baptism as such, that is, that infants ought to be baptised because they are infants ; those, therefore, who are opposing this are combating an imaginary error of their own devising. That some infants ought to be baptised I have no doubt, not because they are infants, but because they are the children of believing parents ; and that believing parents ought to have their children baptised I am equally assured of ; but as this is the chief point of dissent with many we will go into it more fully.

We find two principles throughout scripture which bear directly on this ; one, already alluded to, is that the household is always linked up with the head of it in privilege, in the government of God ; the other, which is closely connected with this, is, that the head is responsible for the household. Noah is a striking

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instance of the former, Eli of the latter.

Noah's house went into the ark with him, because they were his house, and because *he* was righteous (see Gen. vii., 1). If one had been an infant surely he had as much this privilege as the oldest, not because of being an infant, but because one of Noah's family.

The flood was part of God's governmental dealings with the earth, and it was in connection with these that they were thus privileged ; but neither their privilege to enter, nor their relationship to Noah would have availed if he had not taken them into the ark. Nor again did being in the ark affect their state of soul, nor give them faith ; as we have each taken up afterwards as to their individual state, Shem being blessed and Ham cursed. Again, the case of the Israelites is a witness to this principle. All were baptised to Moses in the cloud and in the sea, when it was not a question of individual faith, but of outward blessing and privilege, and of human relationship which gave the title, and circumcision which introduced into those privileges in God's way ; for He had given circumcision in connection with this outward place of privilege before Him. Abraham acted upon this, in his day, and in doing so made no distinction between Ishmael and Isaac. There was a very great distinction in other ways, as regarded personal faith, etc., but not in this. The point was that they belonged to Abraham—formed part of his house, and it was

his responsibility—his act—flowing from what God had given and made known to him. He does not wait till Isaac grows up first to see how he will turn out, nor does he refuse Ishmael because he had no faith. Household baptism goes on the same principle. In Abraham's case it took the form of a command, as afterwards connected with the legal system, but this does not touch the principle, which is just as clearly established in the New Testament. The Lord says of Zaccheus, "This day is salvation come to this house." Peter says, in Acts ii., "The promise is to you and to your children." Paul says "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Along with this we find the other principle we have alluded to, viz., that the head of the house is responsible for the household. God says of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him," etc. Eli, on the other hand, receives the most withering reproof and judgment from God because he had failed to rule his house according to their position and privileges. Circumcised no doubt they were, and thus brought into what they were entitled to by birth, but now, being there, he was responsible to train them according to the place they were in. He was wrong, not in circumcising them first, but in not training them afterwards.

This principle we have also in the New Testament. In Ephesians vi. we read, "Fathers bring

them (your children) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The father is responsible to do this. Eli was responsible for his sons ; he was judged for their sins ; they were judged, but he was also. Christian parents need to weigh this solemnly ; they say sometimes, "I teach my children about Christ, and put the gospel before them, and set them a good example, and what more can I do?" Was this enough in Eli's case? If they had not been his children, sharing a place of privilege through their connection with him, it would be enough ; and so with a Christian as regards the world ; it is all he can do, and is responsible to do in connection with it. But this is not the place he must give his children ; this is not bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, for we do not bring the world up in these. Eli, as we know, did much ; he set his sons a good example, he taught them, and even re-proved them ; but he did not, for all that, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ; and God held him responsible for their wickedness. He might plead, as so many are ready to do, "I cannot give my children a new nature, nor create in them desires for what is right and good ; I must leave them with God to do that " ; I answer, God holds each father responsible to bring up his children as Christian children, as under the authority of Christ, and subject to Him, and in separation from the world. The whole house must be separated to Christ, and subject to Him.

The wilderness might not appear to be such a pleasant place for the young ones who were baptised to Moses, as Egypt was* ; that was not the question, but their connection with God and with Moses, to whom He had given authority, and their complete separation from Egypt and its rulers.

The children of believing parents ought therefore to be in a distinct place from the world, to be trained up in the fear of the Lord, and, what is of primary importance in each case, *full and unqualified obedience and subjection to their parents in everything*. The parents are then fully entitled to count upon God for their salvation, and to look and watch for the manifestation of divine life, and faith in Christ, in their children. The children should form part of a Christian household, and baptism is the admission to the place of a Christian outwardly, as well as owning the lordship of Christ in the act. Is not the head of the house then responsible to own the authority of Christ as to every member of his house? Should he not put them on the ground where it is owned, and in the way that God has set forth? To refuse to do so, is either in effect saying that they are not different from the world, or else, to act on the principle of Cain, though unwittingly, in presenting something to God apart from death ; that is, to act as though sin were

* But let us bear in mind that, however attractive Egypt might appear as a place of self-gratification, it was the place of death. It represents the world in its independence of God and under His judgment—a place too of cruel bondage to God's people until delivered from its power.

not in the world, and children were not by nature sinful and at a distance from God. It is another principle, that we cannot be in relationship to God apart from death—from that which sets forth Christ's death of which circumcision under law and baptism in Christianity are the symbols or figures—more fully expressed by baptism, as Christianity is above and beyond Judaism : one being a command as connected with a legal system, the other of grace, and connected with a dispensation of grace flowing from the death of Christ.

There are some who content themselves with asserting that there is no command in the scriptures for baptising the children of a believer, as though this settled the matter. But this is not the scriptural way of considering it, and does not in the least affect the proofs that a person is acting consistently with scriptural teaching and practice in baptising his household ; for it is not a matter of command, but of acting according to the principles which scripture makes known and establishes. We must remember that principles are not deductions or suppositions ; they form an important part of the Word of God, and are for our guidance.

We have before seen that there is no command to be baptised, and we have also shown that scripture lays down no rules as to who should be baptised, but we have scriptural teaching, principles, and practice to guide us.

If any will go in for a command, there is only

one, and that possibly is too comprehensive for them, namely, Matthew xxviii., 19 and 20, which I will quote : "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them *to* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have enjoined you" (correct translation). I am aware this has nothing to do with the church or assembly, which is a gathering out *from* the nations ; but still here is baptism extending beyond the church period altogether. We are now, however, considering it in connection with Christianity, or the present dispensation.

What we have seen is that baptism puts a person on the ground of Christianity, and that the children of Christian parents should be there, as they are to be brought up in subjection to Christ ; and that a believer in baptising his house is acting scripturally, according to the principles and teaching of scripture.

If a believer regard his children as mere sinners like the rest of the world, and therefore refuses to baptise them, it is in opposition to the principle we have just considered of "thou and thy house," as connected with governmental blessing ; and if he says he can bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord without baptising them, it is setting aside the other principle we have noticed, that, as children of Adam, we cannot be put in a position of even outward relationship to God apart from death.

Hence, "we are buried with Him (Christ) by baptism unto death." Not only so ; we have seen that baptism is the boundary line between Christianity and the world ; and a Christian should never admit the thought of his children growing up for the world, or becoming ungodly ; if they do, is he not responsible ?

In Ephesians iv. we have further instruction regarding this subject, and the consideration of it may be helpful.

We have three things in verse 4, which are inseparably connected : "One Body," "One Spirit," "One Hope." These *cannot* be separated, they must go together. Then in verse 5 we have a larger circle, and three things again connected there, and *must not* be separated ; they go together : "One Lord," "One Faith," "One Baptism." The fourth verse takes in all who have the Holy Spirit, and are therefore in the Body of Christ ; the 5th takes in all who are under the authority of Christ professedly. A Christian should (as most will admit) bring up his children in the faith of Christ, and teach them to own His authority, and, as we have seen, this is just where baptism comes in, and *not* in connection with the Body and the Hope.

But it has been said : "You ought then to reverse the order of the verse, and put baptism first." I answer : No ! there is no force in such a remark, for if there were no such thing as the lordship of Christ and the Christian faith, there would be no meaning in

baptism ; but when you have a Lord and Christ to baptise them to, and you mean to bring them up in the faith of Christ, there is an evident meaning in baptising them without reversing the order of the verse.

People may reason about it, and explain away what is clear enough in itself, or, as is sometimes done, point to the failure afterwards with regard to their children, of those who have had them baptised, and to the bad behaviour of those children who have been baptised ; and thus keep themselves in darkness and confusion as to these things ; but the after failure, on the part of those who have practised what is right, does not make right wrong, nor alter the scriptural truth as to this in the least, any more than the failure of Eli should furnish a reason why Israelites should not circumcise their children till they first saw how they would grow up.

If it were a question of something pertaining to this life, or worldly gain, they would not so reason nor act. If a parent knew some worldly advantage could be obtained for his child, he would be quick enough to secure it, without waiting till the child first grew up to see if he were worthy or deserving of it, or willing to accept it.

But some say, "What advantage is there in baptising them ? what good are their privileges to them if they should turn out ungodly ? in what respect are your children better than mine," etc. I again

answer, a Christian parent should never allow such a thought as that his children will grow up ungodly ; he is responsible that it should not be so ; but anyhow, privileges are privileges for all that ; how they may be used does not alter the fact that they are real and valuable. What did Israel do with their privileges ? —abused them most shamefully. “ What advantage then hath a Jew, or what profit is there in circumcision ? ” *“ Much every way,”* says scripture (Romans iii.).

Some may be slow to apprehend the nature and value of these privileges ; and in a day like the present we need patience and forbearance with each other ; but those who do know them are responsible to value them. It is well, too, that those who insist that household baptism is wrong (and there are not wanting those who speak in the most bitter and sweeping way about it), and that baptism must always follow conversion and faith in Christ, should know that not only have they no scripture for the latter, but that, as to the former, they are opposed to the teaching, principles, and practice of scripture ; for there we get persons baptised, without the slightest warrant for saying they first believed.

In that day persons understood very well that when baptised they were thus made Christians outwardly—that is, they took that ground, and brought their household there too. If they did not baptise them (the household) these still remained on Jewish or pagan ground, but the moment they too were

baptised, they were cut off from their former connections, and shared the persecution of their parents. They, too, were brought out of the rebel camp, and put under the authority of Christ ; and might be cut down by the enemy ; *might* be “baptised for the dead,”* as some were in that day. People say, how can children “put on Christ,” or be “baptised for the dead” ? But let me ask, if not baptised where were they ? If a Jew was converted and baptised, but not his children, where were they ? Why, on Jewish ground, of course ; in the rebel camp—identified with the rebels ; it would then be a case of faithfulness to the Lord, as with Lydia, to bring them out of it ; and they, when baptised, would be brought out of Judaism, and disowned by their friends in it. When a Jew was thus awakened (as in Acts ii.) would he be content to escape from the apostate condemned place himself and leave his family there ? Surely not ; but, as in Egypt of old, would say, “not a hoof shall be left behind.” He would not wait till they grew up to choose between Judaism and Christianity for themselves.

We have now noticed most of the cases of baptism and passages where it occurs. Of course where anyone insists that baptism must necessarily follow conversion,

* *All* were not baptised “for the dead.” The apostle did not say the Corinthians were, but asks them—“What shall *those* do who *were*, &c., if the dead rise not.” The Corinthians were not undergoing persecution.

and is not the reception to Christian ground, there will be no apprehension of the value of household baptism, though, as we have seen, it was practised in the beginning, and the principles which justify a Christian in baptising his house are taught plainly in the Word ; and by a Christian's house is meant, those for whom he (or she) is responsible before God, or as expressed in the case of the jailor, "all his."

Outside a believer's house there is no warrant for baptising any unless there be professed repentance first ; still, the responsibility is with the one who baptises *in all cases*, and though, as is often the case in the present day, neither baptiser nor baptised, nor the parents of the baptised, may be true believers, yet the one is acting as Christ's servant and baptising to Him and in His name, and the one baptised is baptised to Him and brought into the place of privilege connected with Him, *outwardly, on earth*, and the act cannot be cancelled nor made null. The one who baptised will have to give account of his work as a servant of Christ—having taken that place—the other will have to give account as one brought on the ground of Christianity. This is not mere supposition ; scripture proves it. We find the Assembly of Sardis addressed in Revelation iii., as responsible because on Christian ground ; yet the Lord says they are dead ; but they are taken up on the ground of being an Assembly, and have the "name to live." It is generally admitted that this Assembly sets forth

Protestantism in its general character and condition. But we know that almost every denomination (and certainly the Establishment) practises baptism when the subjects of it are young ; but whether old or young, we find them in Revelation iii. addressed on assembly ground ; they were brought there only by baptism. This has always been the object of it in the professing church (and so far they have been right) ; indeed, this is the only way anyone ever was, or could be, brought on to the ground of Christianity ; but we find that these lifeless professors (baptised for the most part in infancy) are addressed as responsible because on assembly ground ; which clearly shows that their baptism is valid, and incurs the responsibility before God of answering to the privileges into which it introduced them.

Again, we find that there are those in the New Testament, in connection with Christianity, who are taken up as servants of Christ, both in His house and in the world, who are not converted at all (Matthew xxiv., 48, and xxv., 26). How did they get there ? How came they to be judged as servants of Christ, and their work gone into by Him as His servants ? This again proves that there is this outward place connected with Christ's name and authority on earth, apart altogether from having spiritual life, and shows the folly of what is called re-baptising, because the first baptiser was not converted, or because the parents were not true Christians, or the one baptised

not converted. The baptism holds good before God as we have seen, and if the person be baptised a thousand times after it does not alter anything or add anything further to the one baptised, but the person who attempts thus to re-baptise is simply stepping into the place of a judge, pronouncing on the work of a fellow-servant, judging before the time, and practically saying that he can do the work better.

The same principles apply to unconverted parents who have their children baptised ; they are responsible together with the baptiser, as we have seen, as they own Christ professedly, and put their children under His authority.

It is a day of confusion and formality, and we are called to walk in separation from all that is not of God and real before Him ; yet we should have scriptural thoughts on all these things, that we may not be ourselves confused nor misled by them. We must not give up what God has given because men have perverted and abused it.

Christians sometimes say, "Well, but unconverted people have their children baptised, and we must not do as they." As well might one say, "They have the Lord's Supper in the various systems of men, and in some cases connected with deadly error, and therefore we had better give it up altogether." We shall never get clear thoughts by reasoning from the confusion around, nor by taking certain supposed cases or examples to throw a difficulty in the way. We

have scriptural principles and practice, and our wisdom is to hold to them, and act on them, however much they may militate against our previous thoughts.

I will now briefly refer to one or two passages that are often quoted in connection with baptism. Mark xvi., 16, is a favourite passage with those who oppose household baptism, but it proves too much, for *according to it* a person is not saved till baptised ; but these say you must be saved first and baptised after. The fact is, the Lord is there looking at salvation in its full sense, connected with the time we are here on earth as well as with eternity, and for this two things are necessary. The vital and by far the most important one is put first, viz., *faith*, and the other is baptism ; it is not a question of which comes first in point of time, but both must be true of the person before he is saved in the sense spoken of there. We need hardly say that a person is fit for the glory—for heaven—the moment he believes, and, like the thief on the cross, could go straight to Paradise through virtue of Christ's work, but when one remains on earth, it is another thing ; there is a place where Christ is professedly owned and the faith of Christ is acknowledged, and if not there previously, such an one should then be brought there. If previously there, of course he cannot be brought there, though not saved till he believes ; and if *not* there when he believes he is not saved (as to his place on earth) till baptised, and thus brought there ; and, if the head of

a family, it is his privilege to bring his children there also, and train them up in the faith of Christ, counting upon God to give them life and faith also ; when this latter takes place they too are saved, as the two things are true of them—they are believers and are baptised ; this is what Mark xvi. teaches ; but it is not faith to say, “ I will wait first and make sure that my children have faith and divine life, and baptise them then ” ; though, of course, if not baptised before they ought to be then. The verse, however, is in full keeping with household baptism, as surely one part of scripture must be with another.

I just notice the case of the eunuch in Acts viii., only to say that verse 37 is spurious, and therefore misleading to those who do not know this. The verse is omitted in all good translations.

Acts xix. gives an interesting and instructive case ; we learn there that John's baptism was then a thing of the past, and in no way connected with Christian baptism ; so these disciples were not on Christian ground at all, and are therefore baptised to the name of the Lord Jesus* (John's was to repentance on the ground of a Messiah coming to the earth) ; then Paul lays

* This instance should be sufficient to convince any thoughtful Christian that a person should not be received at the Lord's Supper until baptised. The Lord's Supper being the expression of the communion of Christians, and, it being the *Lord's* Table, *only* those who are on Christian ground, and who are put under His authority outwardly, should be there ; though much more than this is also necessary.

his hands on them and they receive the Holy Ghost. Notice the question he puts to them in verse 3, "to what then were ye baptised?" He at once assumed they were baptised because they were disciples, as they would not be disciples unless baptised, but "to what," he asks them; for if to Christ, they would be on Christian ground, where the Holy Ghost dwelt. They are then received by baptism (being baptised to Christ), and afterwards receive the Holy Ghost.

There is another point in connection with this subject to which we must refer. The question is sometimes asked, "Is sprinkling baptism?" It was not, I judge, the scriptural mode of baptising; but the question really is, Does God recognise it? We have seen that He does from Rev. iii., where Sardis comes in, and we know that for the most part with Protestantism sprinkling is the custom, and has been for hundreds of years. Did then all that go for nothing? Was it nothing before God and Christ? Was it not meant in good faith to be baptism?

But again, were not Israel, young and old, baptised to Moses in the cloud and sea? Yet how many of them went under the water? * Scripture, as we have seen, gives no command concerning it, either as to who are to be baptised or how it is to be done; only we know from scripture that water was the agent

* The Egyptians were immersed but not baptised, while the Israelites were baptised but not immersed. Baptism is not necessarily immersion, though probably the scriptural mode.

used, and that going into it was the custom, and we ought to keep to scriptural practice for ourselves, but as to others—"Where there is no law there is no transgression." They baptise the person to Christ by water, owning Him thus. The act is *bonâ-fide* before Him, and who are we to set it aside or pronounce upon its merits? However, the proof we have adduced from Rev. iii. alone is quite sufficient to satisfy any honest mind, for we see there that Christ addressed them as on Christian ground—on assembly ground—though they had not life at all, and were for the most part baptised by sprinkling, and when young.

1st Corinthians i., 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 must be noticed. Here again, the question raised by Paul is—to *whose* name they had been baptised. Not to Paul's own name, even in the case of those baptised by him; but *lest they* should say he had baptised to his own name, he is thankful he had baptised so few of them, adding that *his commission* was not to baptise but to preach the gospel, which was infinitely more important. Had some obscure person baptised the Corinthians there would not be the same danger of their carnal minds using his name for party purposes and boasts, as that of the apostle Paul. But there is another thing we find here—that besides the two mentioned by name, he had baptised the house of Stephanas, and this seems to be referred to in a way distinguishing them from the two others mentioned. We find "the house of Stephanas" again

spoken of in chapter xvi., where a different Greek word is used from the 1st chapter, which latter is the same as in Acts xvi., and generally (if not always) in scripture meaning family or descendants when applied to persons. Whether all or any of them were converted or believers when baptised we are not told ; and what is said in chapter xvi. does not at all preclude the thought of children being there and being baptised.

I will now briefly refer to a few scriptures, which, though not alluding to baptism, illustrate the principles connected with the baptism of a believer's household, and the importance of it.

There are those who treat baptism as though it were a matter of no importance *when* a person is baptised, or whether baptised at all or not. It is well for them that they are not under law but under grace, though that is no excuse for carelessness.

How often one hears of persons being at the Lord's Supper some time, and then baptised when they think fit ; others kept waiting till a public ceremony can take place, on the basis that it is a public confession of being dead and risen with Christ. It is true we are under grace and called to liberty, but it is liberty to do God's will, to understand His mind, and act on it for ourselves and our families, walking and acting on the principle of *faith*, and not of law, and this in baptism as well as in everything else.

The first scripture I will instance is Exodus iv., 24,

where we have in the case of Moses on his way to Egypt a striking example of the importance of recognising what God has given, and the difference between His purposes and counsels in grace, and His *ways* in government. Moses had been shortly before in the presence of Jehovah, and He had communicated His purpose respecting Israel to him ; but now He seeks to kill him because he had neglected to circumcise his child—influenced evidently by his wife ; but he was responsible as head of the house, and God would not allow this slighting of what He had given. Moses must apply this significant act to His own house, given as it was to Abraham in connection with the very thing for which Moses was sent to Egypt—the blessing of the seed of Abraham in Canaan. It was the sign of the covenant between Him and Abraham, and the uncircumcised child was to be “cut off” (see Genesis xvii., 14). It was therefore serious for the child, as well as for the parent, to neglect it ; and yet Christians ask, “What difference does it make to a little child whether baptised or not?” and others, again, contend that a believer’s child is by birth brought into all the privileges of Christianity, quoting 1st Corinthians vii., “now are they holy.” So was the Hebrew child, it was *holy* (that is relatively holy, or holy as to its place and relationship) by birth ; but let the parents neglect to circumcise it, and what good were its advantages and privileges ? It must be “cut off.”

But, again, we have instances in scripture, and connected in the same way with the government of God, of how the faith of one is owned for the blessing of another, and these instances give us principles that apply to the baptism of a believer's house.

In the first part of Matthew ix. we have the man with the palsy getting governmental forgiveness, and as a consequence perfect restoration to health, through the *act of faith in others*. It says, "Jesus seeing *their* faith." Clearly it was their act which manifested their faith, and the man is blessed. Another case is Acts iii., where the lame man is cured by Peter. In verse 16 Peter explains how it was effected. He says, "*His* (Christ's) name through faith in His name hath made this man strong," etc.; but where was the "faith in His name"? Not in the man, but in Peter. It may have resulted in faith on the part of the man afterwards, but this is not said directly, and certainly *his* faith is not the ground of his being made whole. It was Christ's name, and faith in His name on the part of Peter; and the blessing received related to God's governmental ways. Administrative forgiveness, as in Matthew ix., goes on the same principle (see James v., 15).

While we hold with a firm hand the blessed truth of God's sovereign grace and electing love, manifested in His actings toward us, who had no claim upon Him, yet on the other hand we must hold fast the principles of His government of this world, as

manifested in His ways in the past, and recorded in scripture for our admonition ; and while we delight in His grace and love—the source of all our blessedness, we must own His government, while we wait for the glory, the blessed end of all His ways in grace and government as regards His own.

S.M.A.

