

X

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

AS PRACTISED BY

THE EARLY CHURCH.

SOME who profess to be Christians deny the permanent obligation of baptism, just as they deny the permanency of the institution of the Lord's Supper, in which is shown forth his death until he come. To such persons our subject can have little interest; and it is not for them that, on the present occasion, we write.

Assuming baptism to be an appointment of the Lord for the observance of his disciples, in the present age, a correct knowledge of the manner in which it was practised in apostolic times must be a matter of the greatest moment, seeing that, at the present time, the professed followers of Christ are divided in judgment as to its proper nature and application; and that in this, as in other matters of revealed religion, there is every reason to believe that, the nearer the source, the purer the stream.'

To obtain a correct knowledge of the practice of the early church in regard to Christian baptism, we propose the following course:—*Ascertain the correct import of the terms in which the original appointment was instituted by the Lord, and the manner in which that appointment was observed by the apostles and those who acted under their directions.*

Matthew and Mark furnish us with a record of the commission which the Lord gave to his disciples regarding the observance of this ordinance. Thus—

All power is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.—Matt. xxviii. 18, 19.

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned.—Mark xvi. 15, 16.

Two inquiries here present themselves—What is the meaning of the word *baptise*? and Who are the parties to be 'baptised?'

First—What is the import of the verb ‘baptise,’ and its corresponding noun, ‘baptism?’ This has long been a matter of great contention; and the dubiety is sustained in the popular mind by the circumstance that these terms stand untranslated in our common English version of the New Testament. Some maintain that sprinkling a few drops of water on a person’s face is baptising; and that such a sprinkling is a baptism. If so, then why not use the terms *sprinkle* and *sprinkling* in the translation? We question very much if any Greek scholar, who valued his reputation, would give *sprinkle* as the equivalent of *baptise*. Not one of the lexicons gives ‘sprinkle;’ while they all give ‘dip,’ or ‘immerse,’ as the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*. Thus Robinson gives—‘1. To dip in,’ ‘to immerse,’ ‘to sink;’ and cites an example of its being so applied to ships, galleys, &c.—‘And many boats were *baptised*—that is, *sunk*. 2. To wash, to lave, to cleanse by washing.’ It would be rather a difficult process to wash by means of sprinkling; and we would be apt to think the person guilty of exaggeration who told us he had *bathed* this morning, when he had merely sprinkled a few drops of water from his fingers upon himself.

Some, by way of opposition to the definition of *baptizo* we have just given, have affirmed that it sometimes signifies ‘to dye;’ a better sort of proof would have been for these gentlemen to have performed the feat of dyeing an article without *immersing* it in the dyeing material. We can easily understand how *baptizo* might be used as descriptive of the act of dyeing, when we know that its primary import is to ‘dip,’ ‘sink,’ or ‘immerse.’ It is very doubtful, however, if an instance can be cited where *baptizo* is so used; but even if there were many, the argument would not be affected.

That the meaning of *baptizo*, or ‘baptise,’ which we have stated to be the only one given in the lexicons, is the proper sense of the word in Scripture, is established by the very best authorities. Thus, Professor STUART, late of Andover, in his *Biblical Repository*, says:

Baptizo means ‘to dip, to plunge, or immerse into a liquid.’ All lexicographers of any note are agreed in this.

With such a testimony as this, we might let the matter rest. We shall, however, cite a few out of many more similar testimonies.

Dr CHALMERS:

The original meaning of the word baptism is immersion; and though we regard it as a point of indifference whether the ordinance be performed this way or by sprinkling, yet we doubt not that the prevalent style of the administration in the apostle’s days was an actual *submersion* of the whole body in water.—*Lectures on Romans* vi. 4.

Principal CAMPBELL, in his *Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence*, says :

I have heard a disputant, in defiance of etymology and use, maintain that the word rendered in the New Testament 'baptise,' means more properly to sprinkle than to plunge; and, in defiance of all antiquity, that the former was the earliest and most general practice in baptising. One who argues in this manner never fails, with persons of knowledge, to betray the cause he would defend; and though, with respect to the vulgar, bold assertions generally succeed as well as arguments, and sometimes better, yet a candid mind will always disdain to take help in falsehood in support of truth.

When, therefore, we read the words, 'He that believeth and is *baptised* shall be saved,' we are warranted in understanding them to mean, 'He that believeth and is *immersed* shall be saved;' and that when Peter, on the day of Pentecost, exhorted his conscience-stricken and alarmed auditors to 'repent and be baptised,' we are authorised to believe that they obeyed this injunction when, having 'gladly received his words, they were *immersed* in the name of the Lord Jesus'—(Acts ii. 38-41). This understanding of the terms 'baptise' and 'baptism,' and no other, rightly harmonises with such language as, 'There went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptised of him in Jordan;' and that Jesus was baptised of John in Jordan, and straightway coming out of the water, he saw the heavens opened'—(Mark i. 5, 9, 10). 'And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptised him: and when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip'—(Acts viii. 38, 39). Remarking on this passage, CALVIN says :

We see from this instance what was the baptismal rite among the ancients; for they *plunged the whole body* in water. Now it is the custom for the minister to sprinkle only the body or head.

The learned gentleman accounts for this deviation from the original practice by affirming that—

The church did from the beginning grant unto herself the liberty to change the ordinances somewhat.

And so the ordinances have been somewhat changed!

Arise, and be baptised, and *wash away* thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.—Acts xxii. 16.

The remission of sins consequent upon obedience to the will of the Lord, in submitting to this ordinance, is doubtless here represented by the term 'wash,' in consequence of the act which Paul was commanded to submit to, being an immersion of 'the whole body in water.'

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.—Rom. vi. 6.

Buried with him in baptism, wherein we also are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.—Col. ii. 12.

On these passages, WHITEY remarks :

It being so expressly declared here that we are buried with Christ in baptism, by being buried under water, and the argument to oblige us to a conformity to his death, by dying to sin, being taken hence, and this immersion being religiously observed by all Christians for thirteen centuries, and approved by our church, and the change of it into sprinkling, even without any allowance from the author of this institution, or licence from any council of the church, being that which the Romanist still urges to justify his refusal of the cup to the laity; it were to be wished that this custom were again in general use.

These remarks of Whitby lead us to observe further, in confirmation that the baptism of the first Christians was an immersion in water, that it continued to be so practised by the Christians long after the apostles had fallen asleep. In proof of which we cite the following accredited testimonies :—

MOSHEIM :

The sacrament of baptism was administered in this [the first] century without the public assemblies, in places appointed and prepared for that purpose, and was performed by the immersion of the whole body in the baptismal font.—*Church History*, vol. i., p. 35.

JOSEPH MEDE, remarking on Titus iii. 5—‘the washing of regeneration’—says :

There was no such thing as *sprinkling*, or *rhantism*, in the apostles’ days, nor long after.

These testimonies are confirmed by allusions to the observance of the ordinance in the writings belonging to the early centuries. Thus, in the writings ascribed to BARNABAS, the following language occurs :—

We descend into the water laden with sins and corruption, and ascend bearing fruit, and having in our hearts the fear and hope that is in Jesus.

JUSTIN MARTYR, who wrote about A.D. 150, in his *Apology for the Christians*, testifies :

We bring those who believe to some place where there is water. . . . They are then washed in the name of God the Father, and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.

MOSHEIM, describing the manner in which baptism was observed in the second century, writes that—

The persons to be baptised, after having repeated the Creed, confessed and renounced their sins, were *immersed under water*.

We might thus go on citing similar witnesses did our limits permit; but, indeed, the fact that immersion in water continued to be practised as the rite of Christian baptism till times far remote from the apostolic period, is too well established to require much confirmation from us; for while many corrupt practices had crept into the professed church of Christ, and while pouring and sprinkling, in course of time, were occasionally resorted to, yet it was not till 1311, that the legislature, in a council held at Ravenna, declared immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent. And in this country, sprinkling was never practised in ordinary cases before the Reformation. From Scotland, it made its way to England, in the reign of Elizabeth, but was not authorised by the Established Church.

In the assembly of divines, at Westminster, held in 1643, it was keenly debated whether immersion or sprinkling should be adopted; 25 voted for sprinkling, 24 for immersion; and even that small majority was acquired at the earnest request of Dr Lightfoot, who had acquired great influence in the Assembly.—*Edinburgh Cyclopaedia*.

Thus, by a majority of one, the appointment of the Son of God was ordered to be changed!

On the ground of these testimonies, facts, and usages, we maintain—*That Christian baptism, as appointed by the Lord, and practised by the apostles and their converts, is an immersion of the whole body in water; and that the now common practice of sprinkling is an innovation and a human substitute for that divinely appointed ordinance.*

The circumstance of 3000 persons having been baptised on one day (Acts ii. 41) is sometimes urged as an evidence that *baptism* cannot mean *immersion*. The immersion of 3000 persons in one day, by the hands of the apostles, say the objectors, is simply an impossibility, and therefore we are shut up to the conclusion that the 3000 who were baptised on the day of Pentecost were not immersed, but *sprinkled!*

Another person might, with equal propriety, urge that there could not have been 3000, but only 300 persons baptised on that occasion. The apparent difficulty might with as great force be used against sprinkling. The act of immersion would not occupy, to any great extent, more time than the act of sprinkling. The objection is based on the idea that the apostles baptised all these

converts with their own hands ; and that idea, again, rests on the supposition that the present practice of committing the administration of baptism into official hands is of apostolic origin. True, the apostles were commissioned to 'disciple all nations, baptising them ;' but the history of their labours shows that these acts were not confined to them. Philip, who was not an apostle—and, so far as the history informs us, had no official appointment, further than that of attending to the wants of poor disciples (Acts vi. 1-6)—both preached and baptised (Acts viii.) And when, through the persecution that arose about Stephen, the church at Jerusalem were all scattered abroad, except the apostles, the historian informs us that 'they preached the Word ;' and as the apostles remained at Jerusalem, those who gladly received the Word from these scattered disciples would also be baptised by their hands.

At all events, the narrative which records the baptism of the 3000 does *not* affirm that the apostles were the baptisers, so that the objection rests on a pure assumption, which has nothing to support it in New Testament history. Well, then, seeing that the act of baptising was not confined to the apostles, we have only to bear in mind what the apostle Paul told the Corinthian church—namely, that the Lord had been seen 'of 500 brethren at once'—(1 Cor. xv. 6)—who were all probably present in Jerusalem on that memorable day, to find a sufficient number to baptise these 3000 converts.

A common apology for the substitution of sprinkling for immersion is, that the *mode* of baptism is of no consequence, and that sprinkling is the more convenient in this country. We readily grant that the mode in which the act of baptism is performed is of little consequence, so that it be '*done warily and discreetly*,' as the Church of England recommends. We would even say, that the most convenient mode, provided it be done '*discreetly and warily*,' is to be preferred, so that the person is really *baptised* ; but sprinkling is not any mode of baptism. Being '*immersed by immersion*' is rather tautological for our English idiom ; but '*immersion by sprinkling*' is sheer nonsense.

Many good people, however, have the impression that the matter of sprinkling or immersion is of very small consequence—indeed, of no consequence at all. This is a very serious mistake, and must surely arise from the foregone conclusion that sprinkling is as really baptism as immersion is. Consider the real question at issue. What was it that the Lord commanded his disciples to do when he

ordered them to baptise? And what was it that the converts of the apostles were commanded to submit to, when they were told to be baptised? These questions we have answered by proper authorities which we have cited, and we have found that immersion of the whole person in water was that which the Lord and his ambassadors commanded to be done. The matter is one of the greatest moment. It is no less than this—Shall we conform to the Lord's appointment, or shall we substitute one of our own? The whole inquiry relates to the import of the Master's law, and conformity to it. The thing which he commands his people to do, it is their duty to perform; and it is nothing less than rank rebellion against his authority to say that the observance of something else will do equally well. What law can be treated thus? Had the apostles sprinkled water upon their converts, instead of immersing them, would they have carried out their Master's commission? Assuredly not. And every believer who has not been immersed in water, into the name of Jesus Christ, is, as yet, disobedient to the will of the Lord. It is in vain for such to talk of friendship and love to Christ. 'If a man love me, he will keep my words.' 'Why call ye me Lord, and do not the things which I say?' These are the words of the Master.

We are not forgetful that many err through ignorance—through wrong impressions. Many imagine that the sprinkling they had in infancy is true Christian baptism. We have, however, called attention to the fact that sprinkling is not baptism at any age. We hear a deal of talk about 'infant baptism;' but there is no such thing as infant baptism practised in a religious sense, in this country, or, indeed, in any country in so-called Christendom, beyond the pale of the Greek Church.* There, and there only, are infants baptised; for in it the practice of immersion has never been departed from. Whether infants are proper subjects for Christian baptism will appear when we consider

THE PROPER SUBJECTS OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

Pursuing our plan of ascertaining the correct import of the terms in which the original appointment of baptism was instituted by the Lord, and the manner in which they were observed by the apostles,

* The order for the public baptism of infants, in the Church of England Service, indeed, ordains that the priest, having been assured by the sponsors 'that the child may well endure it, he shall dip it in water discreetly and warily;' but the practice of dipping the infant has been abandoned: the exception of sprinkling has become the rule.

we proceed to ascertain—*Who are the parties the Lord commanded his apostles to baptise?*

The commission runs thus :

Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.—Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

Some of those who maintain that infants are proper subjects of Christian baptism, refer to the words of this commission for proof. The pronoun 'them,' it is argued, relates to the previous noun, 'all nations.' 'Teach all nations, baptising them;' as the nations must have included infants, and our Lord commanded the apostles to baptise them, without mentioning any restrictions or limitations, therefore he commanded his apostles to baptise infants as well as adults. The appeal here is to the grammar of the passage; but, unfortunately for the argument in question, grammatical law is against it. One of these laws is, that 'a pronoun must agree with its antecedent in gender, number, and person.' Well, the Greek word here rendered 'nations' is neuter, while the pronoun 'them,' in the original, is masculine; so that the grammatical argument for infant baptism in this instance fails. The pronoun 'them' (*autous*) must have some antecedent understood, with which it agrees in number, gender and person. There is a law to the effect, that pronouns may be used *absolutely*—an antecedent being understood agreeing with the pronoun. The noun most obviously understood here is 'disciples,' derived from the foregoing verb, *matheteuo*, 'to make disciples.' It is agreed on all hands, that the verb rendered 'teach,' in the authorised version, properly means 'disciple'—that is, 'make disciples.' Thus supplemented, the language would be, 'Go ye, disciple all nations, baptising the disciples into the name,' &c., 'teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you.' Make disciples of all the nations, baptising the disciples, and teaching them all I have commanded you. This understanding of the language is in complete conformity to grammatical rule, and also recommends itself to the common sense of the reader. How, possibly, could the apostles baptise the nations, independent of the faith of these nations? For surely the nations were not all infants who could be immersed against their will. The nations which the apostles were sent forth to teach, or make disciples of, were unbelieving nations, hostile to the new doctrine; and before any adult in these nations would submit to immersion by the hands of the apostles, he must be convinced that their doctrine was true; so

that, so far as adults were concerned, it must have been as disciples that they were to be baptised, and the apostles would fulfil their mission in baptising them.

Infants could have been baptised without having faith, or giving consent; that is, they could have been immersed in water; but how could they possibly be baptised into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit?

Moreover, this common sense construction of the Lord's words in Matthew entirely agrees with his language recorded by Mark:

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned.—Mark xvi. 15, 16.

The Rev. Charles Stovel writes:

If no puzzling twistification, arising out of controversy, had warped our judgment, common sense, looking at the whole case, would lead us to conclude that these words, relating to the same subject, and uttered by the same infallible Lord, must harmonise with those recorded in Matthew. In both cases, it is said, 'Go forth;' but where? The words of Mark say, 'Into all the world;' and 'all the world' must include 'all the nations' in the world. But what are you to go for? It is said, 'Make disciples.' And how shall this be done? Proclaim the joyful tidings to every creature. But who, then, shall be saved? 'He that believeth and is baptised.'*

By all manner of reason, the persons made disciples were believers, and they were the parties to be baptised.

We shall now pass from the terms of the commission to the manner in which the apostles, by their action, show they understood it. The first instance is recorded in Acts ii. 37-41:

37. Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, 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 Spirit. 39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41. Then they that gladly received his word were baptised; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

The language of verse 39 has been used as an argument for infant baptism. But observe, that neither infants, nor baptism is mentioned in it. While the term 'children' may describe or include

* *Christian Discipleship and Baptism.* By the Rev. Charles Stovel. P. 228.

infants, it also may have its common import of posterity, without reference to age; and that this is the sense intended, the whole context confirms.

The thing promised to the parties addressed, and to their children, is either 'the gift of the Holy Spirit,' or 'the remission of sins,' or both—(see verse 38); but these favours are promised to the parties addressed on condition that they 'repent and be baptised;' so that, from the apostle's language, there is no reason to doubt that 'the promise' was to be fulfilled to their 'children' when they complied with the same requirements.

Notice further, that the command to 'be baptised' was, like the command to 'repent,' confined to the conscience-stricken inquirers. 'What shall *we* do?' cried they. 'Repent and be baptised, every one of *you*,' replied the apostles. Had the exhortation been, 'Repent and be baptised, you and your infants,' the case for infant baptism would have been clear. As the language stands, it is clearly the opposite. And so the narrative proceeds: 'Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then *they that gladly received his word* were baptised.' On what authority can any one add, 'and their children?'

The next case of baptism recorded in order is Acts viii. 12:

When they [the Samaritans] believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women.

Here we have an instance where being baptised is not only limited to those who believed, but also where we have every reason to expect that the baptism of infants would have been mentioned had it really taken place. The historian records the baptism of 'both men and women.' Had the children of these men and women been likewise baptised, he would have written, 'men, women, and children.' The omission of the mention of children, on any other plea than their non-participation in the rite, is altogether inadmissible.

But there is not a single instance of infant baptism recorded in the New Testament. We have, it is true, mention of the baptism of three households; but in regard to two of these, *jointly*, as well as baptism, is predicated of the household. The first case we refer to is recorded in Acts xvi. 25-34. The alarmed jailor cried: 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' The reply given was: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.' The salvation of the jailor's house was promised, as well as the salvation of himself. Are we, then, warranted to infer that the

household of the jailor was to be saved through his faith, and independently of their own?—that the command, 'Believe,' was limited to the jailor, while the promise of salvation embraced himself and his household? Few, we presume, will affirm this. Where, then, is the ground for affirming that any of that household were incapable of believing? That they were not, is both implied and affirmed. Did they speak unto him 'the word of the Lord?' They did it also 'to all that were in his house'—(verse 32). And it is not more distinctly affirmed that 'he and all his were straightway baptised,' than it is said that 'he believed in God with all his house'—(verses 33, 34).

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, first chapter, and 16th verse, the apostle Paul mentions that he had baptised 'the household of Stephanas;' and at the close of that letter (chap. xvi. 15), he characterises 'the household of Stephanas' as being 'the first-fruits of Achaia,' and having 'addicted themselves to the ministry of the Word.' Beyond all reasonable doubt, these two households had believed, as well as been baptised.

The only other case where the baptism of a household is mentioned in the New Testament, is in Acts xvi. 14, 15—the baptism of Lydia and her household. Here there is no mention of faith on the part of the household. The most that an infant baptiser can affirm of this instance is the possibility of infants being in the family of Lydia at this time; but it is equally possible that there were not; and when we take into consideration all the circumstances we have already noticed, the certainty that this household, like the others mentioned, believed as well as were baptised, is as well established as that of any probability can be.* So that, from all we have seen, we are warranted to adopt the words of Neander, in his history of planting:

* Those who contend for the presence of infants or children of any age in such households as those of Lydia and the Philippian jailor, seem to forget that the construction of Roman society gave to the term 'household,' in general, a widely different meaning from that which we commonly attach to it among ourselves. To take Lydia's case. We are not even told she was a married woman, or had ever been so. Is it asked, How then could she be at the head of a household? Well enough—she carried on business connected with the dyeing of purple, and those who wrought with her in this would doubtless stay under her roof (where the work would be carried on), and so constitute her household; so that, in point of fact, there might be with her not a single blood relation of her own. Such a use of the word is not quite unknown even in our country. The Queen's household does not include a single member of the royal family proper, being made up of the royal domestics and retainers—a body somewhat resembling 'Caesar's household'—(Phil. iv. 22).

It is certain that Christ did not ordain infant baptism. We cannot prove that the apostles ordained infant baptism from those places where the baptism of a whole family is mentioned.

That the rite of Christian baptism, in the days of the apostles, was administered to believers only, is confirmed by the way in which baptism is spoken of and alluded to in the epistles to the churches.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.—Rom. vi. 3, 4.

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.—Col. ii. 12, 13.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ.—Gal. iii. 26, 27.

Language this which could have no meaning applied to those who had been baptised in infancy. Infants, indeed, are capable of being immersed in water, but immersed 'into Christ' they cannot be. 'As many of you as have been baptised into Christ have *put on* Christ;' and the parties so spoken of were 'all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.' They had risen with Christ 'through the faith of the operation of God;' and they were in consequence called on to 'walk in newness of life.'

Thus we have demonstrated, from the terms of the commission which the Lord gave his disciples regarding baptism, and the record of the manner in which they and their converts carried out that commission, that Christian baptism, as practised by the early church, was an immersion in water of those who confessed their faith in Jesus Christ; and that this baptism is, in the writings of the apostles, termed 'baptism into Jesus Christ'—a 'putting on Christ,' so as to be in him. This demonstration could be supported by the citation of many other Scriptures and considerations; but we prefer to place the matter in this simple yet definite form.

The intelligent reader will be able to discern whether he has been baptised according to the Lord's command. If he has not, will he permit us to urge the inquiry upon him, whether he is acting obediently towards the Lord, and wisely towards himself? Too many treat the matter with indifference, saying it is not essential to salvation, &c. Is this honouring the Lord and his appointment? Paul did not act thus when he exclaimed, 'Lord, what wilt thou

have me to do?' Is it essential that you conform to the will of the Lord? Or can you treat his appointments with indifference, and yet honour his name? We address those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. Many such, who are waiting for his return, have never been 'baptised into' him according to his appointment. Some of those will read these paragraphs. Dearly beloved, let us urge the question, Are you in this condition *ready* for his coming? The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Galatia; 'As many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ'—(Gal. iii. 27). Does it not follow, that if they had not been *baptised into Christ* they would not have 'put on Christ?' and consequently would not have been '*in Christ!*' And if not in Christ, what would have been their fate at his coming? The parable of the Ten Virgins shows that it is possible to be looking for the Lord's return, and yet not to be ready for it. They all went out to meet the bridegroom, and they all slept; but five of them were ready, the others were not; and these found it was too late to get ready after that. In view of that speedy coming, would it not be safer for you, and more honouring to the Lord, that, in submission to his will, you follow the example of the early church, who gladly received the word and were baptised?

One thing commonly urged against such demonstrations as the foregoing is, that we make too much of baptism. In reply, we have only to submit, that we make no more of it than the Lord and his apostles have done. Our appeal has been to Scripture; and if the answer is in our favour, to urge such an objection is altogether vain. In reality, however, the charge of 'making too much of baptism' lies rather against those who hold baptism to be valid *without faith*, as in the case of infants. Verily, that is making too much of baptism!

It is not generally known that the practice of *infant baptism* originated in the idea of its intrinsic efficacy to take away sin. The first advocate for baptising infants was Cyprian, who wrote between A.D. 248 and 258. His plea for the practice was:

Let them be baptised, that they may not perish. The age of the infant is not material, and the incapability of the sick man is of no moment—the form and circumstance are but adjuncts. The principal thing is the grace, the spirit, the supposed communication in the rite, without which men cannot be saved. Let them be baptised, therefore, as they can, that they may not perish.*

This was the grand plea for the baptism of infants. From its

* *Christian Discipleship*, p. 401.

rise in Northern Africa, down to the Reformation, the argument for the innovation, is the supposition that in baptism a divine grace was communicated to the subject, without which salvation was impossible; and this supposition led even to the baptism of abortions. Yea, even the Caesarian operation was performed on dying mothers, that the unborn infant might be baptised, and so be saved! Presbyterians and Independents are shocked at such an idea. Let them, however, bear in mind that, but for this idea, infant baptism might never have been introduced. With whom, then, lies the charge of making too much of baptism? With those who maintain that, without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism is a mere immersion in water, destitute of meaning or utility, whether its subject be an infant or an adult; or with those who maintain its sacramental efficacy, even in the case of an infant of a few days? We have seen from the Lord's commission to his apostles, and the manner in which they carried out that commission, and the language they have used concerning baptism, that believers only are its proper subjects. And we maintain that, without faith in Jesus Christ, it is impossible to be baptised into Christ. (Immerse a man, or a child, in water you may, but unless the party baptised has the faith of the gospel, ten thousand immersions will leave him as much out of Christ as is the untutored Indian who has never heard his name.) God's order can never be neglected or reversed with safety. Salvation is not of human will, or human effort, but of God who showeth mercy; and God's unaltered appointment is, 'He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.' Instead of undervaluing faith in Christ Jesus, we maintain that, unless a sinner believes that Jesus is the Christ, in the Scriptural sense of these terms—believes that he is the Anointed of God to sit on the throne of David, and reign over the house of Jacob for ever, when all nations and languages shall serve him—believe in him as the Son of the living God, who died on the cross that whosoever believeth on him might not perish but have everlasting life—believe in him as their Lord and Master, who redeemed them by his blood; and so believing, wait and watch for his appearing—baptism would be utterly useless.

Why God has associated immersion in water along with faith in the name of Jesus Christ, is a question to which no specified answer is given in the Scriptures, neither does it concern us. The prophet of Israel bade the Syrian leper wash seven times in Jordan, and be clean. *Why* the waters of Jordan were chosen in preference to others, he was not informed; but, yielding to the wise counsel of

his servant, he washed and was cured. God willed to make the one thing consequent upon the other: that was enough. And so it is here. Yet there seems a beautiful appropriateness in the appointment of a believer's immersion in water, in the name of the Lord Jesus, as the initiatory step in the way of life. Those who thus enter the family of God, confess themselves His children, and, by consequence, their submission to His will. In being baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, they thereby acknowledge his lordship over them; that they are not their own, but his, and henceforth bound to serve him. Their future life is to be one of submission to his authority; hence the apostles were commanded to teach those whom they made disciples to 'observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them'—(Matt. xxviii. 20). The act of obedience to the command to be baptised is one of the purest or simplest acts of submission to the Lord's will. It is, at the same time, an act to which no merit can be attached; and there is no reason for its performance apart from the will of God. The acts of doing justly, loving mercy, and fearing God, are binding on us, not merely because God has commanded them, but also from the nature of the case; and men often perform acts of justice and benevolence without any reference to divine authority; but the immersion of a believer in water, into Jesus Christ, is an act of pure submission to his Lordship: the answer of a good conscience to the mandate of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Thus, it seems a most appropriate and expressive initiatory step in the way of patient continuance in well-doing, which leads to glory, honour, and incorruptibility.

What is needed in these latter days is a hearty return to the faith of apostolic times, and a ready obedience to the appointments of the Lord, as we find these expressed in the New Testament, and exemplified in the conduct of the faithful in the early church. Only thus prepared shall we stand approved in the presence of the Lord at his coming.

That you, dear reader, may lovingly and gratefully embrace the truth as it is in Jesus; and by being baptised into him, become his, and be glorified together with him at his appearing and kingdom, is the earnest desire of the writer.

W. LAING.

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