

## Recent Baptismal Agitation

W. Kelly.

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To Mr. W. T. B.

Dear Brother, — You are not alone in speaking strongly of some tracts lately published. They are condemned not only by all who differ from the author's views, but (what is of more importance) by wise and sober brethren who accept that which may be called the same side of the question. How grievous to have to speak of sides in the least of divine things! But so it is

I have for many years said little on the matter, save where clearly called for. Every one who loves the Lord Jesus and serves the church has probably more or less observed the keen feelings and strong language the discussion of baptism is apt to excite, in utter disproportion to its relative place and as usual most heatedly among such as least understand its nature and consequences. It has seemed the plain path of grace and wisdom, not to say of truth and righteousness, to set one's face resolutely against party-spirit, and so against the zealots of either side. They both tend to make a sect of their own, the horror of which, to me, is Done the less, because the sect would fight under Baptist or Paedobaptist colours. Indeed if there could be a shade of difference, where both tend to a common evil result, one ought to feel most where most truth was thus perverted. Those who thank God for the apostle Paul's gospel should not forget his thankfulness on this score (1 Cor. 1: 14-17); and the value of these words of the Spirit appears to me so much the more plain, weighty, and urgent in the actual weakness of the saints and confusions of Christendom.

It would be well for all to avoid one-sided and exaggerated statements. There is no doubt for instance that Baptists generally take wrong ground in advocating what is due to this institution of the Lord. They plead the instance of John the Baptist and our Lord's example for us also to accomplish all righteousness. they insist on the baptism of believers as a matter of obedience; they dedicate their babes meanwhile till they are converted and seek baptism for themselves. Granted that all this proves distressing ignorance not of christian baptism only but of christianity; but is it not forgotten that no less ignorance in these very particulars, involving the most fundamental principles, rests on the great mass of Paedobaptists, save that they talk of dedicating their children to God in baptism?

The only fair inference therefore is that the legal or Judaizing view complained of is quite independent of this question, attaching to the general creed and practice of Christendom, and surely developing itself in ordinary Baptists and Paedobaptists alike, though in a slightly different form and phrase. On a fair comparison I am afraid the statements about baptism made by the ancient fathers in general were no better than Tertullian's, and that the Mennonites are no worse than Lutherans or Calvinists or Anglicans. The departure from christian truth lies far deeper than this question; and the Paedobaptists generally are surely not less legal and superstitious than the mass of Baptists. Nor is there ground save for anguish and humiliation in considering the words and ways of them all as one weighs what Christ is to us and has called us to. Why then mix up all this with the question? The common Paedobaptist is as ignorant as the Baptist of the difference between John's baptism and the christian one; they both know as much or as little of death and resurrection with Christ.

Again, which of the two has been the most guilty of erasing from Christian baptism its character of privilege conferred, by erecting it into a saving ordinance obedience to which is peremptory? Both have one far away from the revealed word, but not least the Paedobaptist

So, as to the meaning of baptism, it will hardly be argued gravely that Paedobaptists ordinarily enter into it one whit better than Baptists. It was the former, not the latter, who invented the flattest possible contradiction of its character. It was not the more despised of the two who spread everywhere the dreadful error that baptism is the sign and even the means of new birth. At the same time I frankly allow that they both equally misunderstand death with Christ. It is therefore unfounded and unfair to reason against the Baptist system as the culprit when in fact Paedobaptism proves equally open to the same charges. The fault common to both lies elsewhere. They have both alas! forsaken to an enormous extent the fountain of living Waters, and they have each hewed out broken cisterns of a different pattern that can hold no water.

For my part I rejoice when brethren who have had a bias one way or other in days of law have learnt of the Lord to meet and go on in grace, whereto they have already attained walking by the same rule, and, if in anything differently minded, confiding in the God of all grace to reveal even this to them, Hence it is a joy to see that, spite of ruin, all simple-minded men agree that baptism is the initiatory institution of Christianity, and that believers, if they have not been, should be at once baptized as the sign of having part with Christ in His death and resurrection. A true and loving and large heart seeks not to widen the breach, but rather to expose and rebuke, as of the enemy, all such efforts.

This is my reason for deploring the last of these tracts, which you justly say is the worst of the kind one has ever seen. I have in my time read not a few painful productions of Papists and Protestants; but I confess that not one occurs to my memory lower, looser, or more systematically perverting the scriptures. Were F. Xavier the famous Jesuit missionary alive, he would smile at such a justification of his procedure from such a quarter; and Charlemagne might have found a two-penny tract as useful is the sword to induce the Saxons to enter the river and be baptized.

For the doctrine broached is that faith before baptism is more wrong than right! that not believing but *baptism* is the means by which the nations were to be disciplined! that they must be brought into the sphere of the church or assembly to receive not only the Spirit but His testimony concerning Jesus! and that this ground, which is Popish as far as it goes, is God's order!! To believe and be baptized is out of His order!!! To make sure of the meaning we are told that Peter did not tell the Jews at Pentecost to believe but to repent. "They were to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *that they might believe on Him!*" etc. Hence even their receiving Peter's word is restricted to "Repent and be baptized," etc., and thus the men repenting after a Methodist sort without being true believers were added to the house over which Christ is Lord, so that they could own Him such, "for of course they must be in the sphere of His lordship before they can own Him Lord."

By this strange doctrine evangelizing is annulled and the purity of God's assembly destroyed. For the notion insisted on throughout is that adults not only may but ought to be received by baptism in order that they may believe and be brought to the Lord where the remission of sins is. Baptism to get life is not only the strangest want of intelligence but fundamentally false doctrine. "SCRIPTURE TEACHES BAPTISM UNTO CHRIST, who is the life, IN ORDER TO GET LIFE," p. 13. Scripture *never* teaches this, but on the contrary that the believer has part with Christ in *death*, and this by baptism as its sign. Nowhere do I remember from any one called a brother such a rash, not to say heartless, sacrifice of the gospel and the assembly of God to a novel idea, which after all is only the revival of an old error which has already corrupted Christendom. Can any notion of Baptists be worse?

I have not reasoned on the various scriptures, to every one of which the grossest violence is done, as indeed must be in order to silence their true sense and force a meaning completely opposed. It is to

be hoped that few if any are prepared to endorse statements so erroneous and unholy, and that brethren everywhere will know what their duty is in dealing with such heterodoxy. It would be easy to expose the ignorance of God's word and the false reasoning, habitually displayed. My object for the present and in this periodical is simply to protest publicly against a dangerous and offensive production.

There are reasons why I desired to say not a word; but called on as I am by appeals from north, south, east, west, I could no longer hesitate to address myself to you the last of these applicants. May no love of party betray even one into indifference to Christ and the truth. Yours affectionately, W. K.

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It seems due to such is doubted the need for the Editor's remarks on the recent baptismal agitation, to say that the writer censured has not only confessed his grave error, but justified what was written in exposure of it. "I accept his letter, as being fully warranted by certain expressions I have made use of, and I own also that the statements I have made tire of such a nature as to fully justify the publication of his letter, even after I had withdrawn my tract." Those therefore who, in the face of this, complain of severity cannot be supposed to judge the false doctrine involved: else they would see more love in reproof than in palliating or cloaking it. May we thank God for what His grace has given, and look for yet more!