

## "Is baptism a figure of what is, or what is about to be, possessed?"

(Examination of a tract entitled:)

It is proposed to bring the statements of this tract to the test of scripture. Though baptized myself as a believer, I cannot sympathize with such as are not only a sect but ignore scriptural light on baptism. On the other hand, who can fairly say that paedobaptism has been shown to be an article of faith? Tracts have been published, manuscripts lent about; but, as far as one can pretend to judge, we are far from having that warrant of holy writ which we justly look for before we accept any doctrine or practice as Christian. Yet one would think that of all matters, none would more seem to want the precious word of the Lord, who fails not habitually to provide for every need of the poor. These had, or might have, children from the first; yet not in one indubitable instance do we hear of their baptism. Even as to the nomination of elders, not nearly so constant a need as baptism, we have full instruction afforded. We know that the church never chose but only apostles or an apostolic delegate. Is the absolute silence as to children casual? Large-hearted and intelligent men on all sides admit that the households of scripture decide nothing as to this. There may have been no infants, or, if there were, the household might be said to be baptized without including them because of the nature of the case. We hear of people baptized, men and women, but not of children; we read of servants of the Lord brought on their way by the brethren with wives and children, but never of children where baptism is in hand. If it be a truth and a privilege intended for the children of the saints, does this appear like His provident wisdom and way? He knows that multitudes of His own are not subtle-minded but simple, and would prefer one word of clear scripture, in doctrine, or precept, or example, above all the theories that ever were spun, even if they could lay hold of them. They feel suspicious when one advocate rests much on the adverbial form πανοικί (Acts 16: 34); another on the difference between οἶκον and οἰκίαν (1 Cor. 1: 16, 1 Cor. 16: 15), especially as those who ought to know as well, with similar views in general, reject these criticisms. When such evidence is caught at with eagerness, the candid must own that real proof must be sorely wanting. The believer will do well to wait for solid ground from God's word. Open and thankful to receive all that is certainly taught by the Holy Ghost, he may have the conviction that as yet infant baptism is "not proven." The tract before me will not commend it to spiritual or even sober minds, but, on the contrary, will serve to warn many of the danger and evil of speculating even on an outward matter like baptism.

In his first sentence the author reveals the true source of the tract. A strong speech ("that they who hold so-called believer's baptism do so in the very teeth of scripture") set him to work. From beginning to end of the discussion this seems to have fired his imagination (pp. 3, 18). It thus becomes his text; and to support it the various passages of scripture adduced are bent with a rude recklessness beyond example. Infant baptism is not that of which I complain, but false doctrine as to adults which undermines the truth and tends to corrupt the Church of God. Every Christian will utterly condemn his idea of baptizing persons in order to believe afterwards, and his systematic perversion of scripture in order to extract a show of divine authority for so gross an error.

On Matthew 28: 19, 20, this is the comment: "Now, here we have our Lord's commission, which is the only commission to baptize. The disciples were to disciple (μαθητευσάτε) all nations; but what was to be the means by which they were to be disciplined? 'baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost,' and having thus been made disciples, they were to teach them all things, etc. . . . It would seem, then, according to Matthew 28: 19, persons were to be made disciples by

baptism in order that they might be instructed about the Lord Jesus, so that they might know and believe on Him, and be taught in all He had said."

First remark the absurdity of making this "the only commission to baptize." For, on the face of it, either Mark 16 warranted Peter and the rest to baptize the Jews, or the apostles baptized them without any commission whatsoever from the Lord. The commission in Matthew contemplates all the nations, but *not the Jews*. Hence the mistake is evident of treating Peter's action in Jerusalem at Pentecost as "just according to the commission of Matthew 28." (p. 7), and again (p. 8), "Peter followed strictly the commission of Matthew 28." How could he, seeing that, according to the tract, the only commission is to baptize the Gentiles, whilst Peter then baptized none but Jews?

But my next charge is a far graver one than making rash and inconsistent propositions. The Lord had the heathen directly in view and told His envoys to disciple them all, baptizing them to the name of the Trinity, and teaching them all that the Lord enjoined. But what can one say of the assertion that baptism, is the means of making these heathen disciples? Who doubts that even the least esteemed in the church can judge this to the writer's shame? Need I quote John 4: 1 to prove the folly of the thought that baptizing is the means of making disciples? "Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John." Baptizing then is the outward form of defining him who is already a disciple. Indeed this I should have thought the most unenlightened Christian must have known without so express a disproof. So too the conduct of the apostles proves. Never do we hear of Peter, or any other, proceeding to baptize in the first place, but to preach; then, those who received the word were baptized. But it was the receiving and confessing the name of the Lord, not the baptism, which constituted them disciples, however certainly the initiatory rite followed their confession. And if the author's thought had been true, how could Paul have declared that Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the gospel? He certainly laboured more abundantly than they all: was he not sent to make disciples? He tells us that he was not sent to baptize, but to do the real work by which disciples are made.

Had the participle translated "baptizing" been, like *πορευθέντες*, in the aorist, before the verb *μαθητεύσατε*, there would have been a ground of argument: as it is, there is none. For it is plain, that the Lord bids His servants disciple all the nations, baptizing them, teaching them, both following the act of making them disciples, one at once as being initiatory, the other all through their earthly career.

On Mark 16: 15, 16, he observes, "In this we have not the *commission* to baptize, but simply the statement, that he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and here, I suppose, all will be agreed." Now I ask any candid man, Is not this a bold way of escaping the force of the scripture which destroys the main position of the tract? Does "he that believeth and is baptized" mean that a man is made a disciple by baptism in order that he might be instructed about the Lord Jesus, so that he might know and believe on Him? No Christian will hesitate which he is to choose — the words of the Lord which are unmistakably plain; or the words of the tract which pervert equally the Lord's commission in Matthew, and what is called "the statement" in Mark. The gospel was to be preached to all, and he who believed it and was baptized (for some, Jews especially, might avoid baptism, while professing faith) should be saved. The discipling of Matthew answers to believing the gospel in Mark, followed in both by baptism. All admit that men might profess falsely of old as now; but this does not touch the question. It is a miserable thing to weaken the value of faith by raking together passages which speak of unreal believers or disciples.\* All admit the fact that hypocrites may deceive; but does the author mean that the Lord intended His servants knowingly or carelessly to receive such? If not, his reasoning only deceives himself. Besides, the last words of his comment contradict his own thesis; because here he speaks of baptizing persons "on their simple profession of faith" (p. 5), which is completely to shift his ground from making them disciples by baptism, in order that they might be

instructed about Jesus, so that they might know and believe on Him. The truth was too strong for the author's will. He is self-condemned.

\* John 2: 11 is used most unintelligently to prove that the disciples were such before they believed. The author would do well to consider Hebrews 11: 8, 9, 17, and ask himself if it be therefore true that Abraham had faith before he had faith. Disciples may have their faith exercised again and again. (See John 2: 22.)

Next comes Acts 2: 38-41. The doctrine of the tract here is: "Peter did not tell them to believe, and then be baptized, but to repent — to judge themselves, and then be baptized for the remission of sins. Now, if they had truly believed, they would have had the forgiveness of sins; but they had not the forgiveness of sins, and therefore, they were not *true* believers; they were to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ that they might believe on Him, and through Him receive the forgiveness of their sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost" (p. 7). Now I distinctly affirm that this is thoroughly bad doctrine, a falsification of God's word, a delusion and a snare for souls. Is the author so infatuated with a theory as to set aside the fundamental truth of God's operation in souls? Does he not see that the repentance on which Peter insisted before baptism implies faith? His doctrine here is the baldest Pelagianism or worse, a mere action on the natural conscience, a self-judgment without true faith, and baptism for the remission of sins distinctly said to be before faith also: "if they had truly believed" (argues he), "they would have had the forgiveness of sins." The reasoning is wholly fallacious, for faith is supposed throughout as it is indeed inseparable from repentance. So repentance, though distinct from faith, is inseparable from believing. Hence if the Philippian jailer was only called on to believe, it would be as false to infer that he did not truly repent, as it is here to infer that there was no true faith because Peter only called on them to repent. There is not the smallest reason to doubt that the persons thus addressed were converted (always leaving room for the creeping in of false brethren) before they were baptized. Only we must remember that the proclamation of repentance and remission of sins in Christ's name was a new thing; faith was not, nor new birth, but the administration of the blessings now first bestowed in Christianity. To suppose therefore, because these souls had not yet remission of sins, that they did not truly believe, is to reason to their state from the Christian's state, fully made known afterwards, and hence a very serious blunder. Is it forgotten that no Old Testament saint enjoyed the Pentecostal state of things? Yet were the saints of old born of God and true believers. The ground taken is false, and the result disastrous. The author has sacrificed God's truth to the imminent danger of souls, because he has merely taken up another's thought, ill-understood, which he himself, not having learnt it from God, does not know how to conciliate with the rest of the truth. I believe there is truth behind, not seen in general, as to the Christian estate introduced at Pentecost. But this tract, far from clearing the ground, destroys as far as it can God's immutable principles in dealing with souls.

The same strange confusion pervades the remarks on Acts 8: 12: "What did they believe? The things concerning the *kingdom* and the *name* of Jesus Christ. They were then baptized and so brought into the kingdom, and to the name of Jesus Christ; but whether they divinely believed in Himself is another thing " (p. 9). Did he not know that "the name" is used for the person? (John 1: 12; 1 John 5: 13.) He writes as though he thought the contrary. Instead of honestly owning the plain proof of his own error (for the chapter distinctly shows that the Samaritans, as believing the things preached, were baptized, contrary to the "doctrine" of the tract), he flies off in a vain effort to disparage the faith of all, because Simon Magus was shown to have been false. "Thus we have in Acts 2 three thousand who were baptized *before* they believed [an egregious error, already pointed out], and were saved; but in Acts 8 we have one who was baptized *after* he believed, but was not saved. In the same chapter (ver. 15, 16), we read of those who had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, but who had not

received the Holy Ghost . . . Whether the eunuch believed before or after his baptism we are not told. But the Scriptures only record that he rejoiced, after that he was baptized" (pp. 9, 10). Does the writer not know that the reception of the Holy Ghost is invariably after faith, not in order to it? Does he not see that Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch, earnestly in quest of the truth already, who, because he believed, asked to be baptized, and not in vain?

The author feels the case of Cornelius to be in his way. "In Acts 10 we have the record of the conversion of the Gentile centurion, who did truly believe and did receive the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, contrary to the words of the commission, and contrary to the practice of Peter in Acts 2" (p. 10). It is really a pain to review a man so confidently talking of matters in which he displays a want of light quite astounding, and makes in a single sentence nearly as many errors as lines. For we have not the record of a conversion, but of bringing a Gentile already converted into the new christian estate. *This ignorance our author shares with the mass of "so-called baptists."* Only, dark as Baptists may be, they respect the fundamental truths of God's work in the soul, and are therefore kept from the far more serious error peculiar to the writer. Peter was to tell Cornelius words [this was the great thing rather than baptism], whereby he and his house should be saved. It is not *quicken*ed (for we must gather from his walk and ways and prayers that he was already acceptable to God, Acts 10: 2, 6, 22, 35) but "saved." And if the writer does not apprehend the difference, he has everything to learn which a man needs in order to write on baptism with safety to himself and edification to others. Again, the case was not "contrary to the words of the commission;" for Cornelius first became a disciple, and was thereon baptized, as no doubt afterwards he received instruction in christian truth and ways. Nor was it "contrary to the practice of Peter in Acts 2." For, as the Jews at Pentecost were not baptized till they received his testimony, so he gave no command to baptize the household of Cornelius till there was the public evidence of their faith by the extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Ghost. The sole difference was, not "the practice of Peter in Acts 2," but God's gracious act preceding, not following, in order to encourage or stop the mouth of Jews, present or absent. But is it not monstrous to suppose, as the author does, that Peter follows the Lord's commission\* with the Jews who were not included in it, and goes contrary to His words with the Gentiles who were expressly in His view? To what can one attribute such incessant mangling of every scripture noticed? Did one ever read a paper more unequivocally written under a spirit of error?

\* This commission says not a word about the gift of the Holy Ghost, the manner of which constitutes the difference between Acts 2 and 10

The case of Saul of Tarsus is dismissed very curtly. There is at least method here, which is to my mind a symptom even worse than thoughtlessness in things so grave. For the history of Saul's conversion in chapter 9 is quite passed by: can one conceive that the author forgot it? Certainly it is an important testimony for one who professes "to take up every scripture referring to baptism" (p. 3). And if the author does not believe that the great apostle was converted before he was baptized, I will repair his omission, and furnish evidence enough to convince every man who is not under the influence of a will-o'-the-wisp. "And Ananias went his way and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith and arose and was baptized." Such is the Spirit's report through Luke. It is for everyone to draw his conclusion whether the apostle was not a true believer till after he was baptized; or if he was, whether *he* too, like the poor Baptists, would not come in God's order, and God must go out of His order and take him to Himself (p. 12).

We have a brief allusion to the apostle's account in chapter 22. "When under conviction of sin, he is told to arise, be baptized, and wash away his sins" (p. 11). If we are to apply the reasoning to this case which we have had in pages 7 and 9, we must suppose the author meant that the apostle as yet had only a natural repentance or conviction of sins, and that he had not life; for if he had truly believed, the argument is, he would have had the forgiveness of sins; but he had not the forgiveness of sins, and therefore he was not a *true* believer, he was to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, that he might believe on Him, etc. Enough and more than enough of such mischievous talk. Granted indeed that the Baptists may not see the truth in these scriptures; but I solemnly arraign the anonymous author not of ignorance merely but of distinct and dangerous heterodoxy.

The same evil error runs through his misuse of the next two cases. "The jailer of Philippi is commonly referred to as one who was a true believer before he was baptized. Now the record does not say anything of the kind, but it does say that he believed and rejoiced after he was baptized (Acts 16: 34). In Acts 19 we have those who had been baptized with John's baptism, and they therefore had to be baptized again; and after their second baptism they receive the Holy Ghost." Now the record is as plain as possible that, when the Philippian jailer asked in the utmost distress what he must do to be saved, he was told, not to be baptized first and believe afterwards (as runs this new gospel which is no gospel), but "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house," without one word about baptism. No one doubts that the same hour he was baptized, and all his, straightway; but the word of God is too wise and holy to insinuate, or to give the smallest sanction to the dream, that he was baptized before he believed, because it is afterwards said that he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. It is remarkable on the contrary that, while his joy is given in the aorist, his faith is described in that form (πεπιστευκώς) which distinctively implies the present or continuing result of what is past.

But the second instance has a really ill look; for the apostle lets us know (Acts 19: 2) that *he* reckoned the disciples to have believed before they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and received the Spirit, contrary to the thesis of the tract. Can we suppose that the writer had not read this or did not know it?

The author at the close (p. 23) supplies the omitted case of Acts 18, "where it says that 'the Corinthians, who believed, were baptized.' And that is the very people to whom Paul wrote, warning them of introducing wood, hay, stubble: reminding them of the house of God in the wilderness, and comparing it with the house of God of this dispensation." Now a mind of ordinary uprightness that had held the idea of baptizing adults in order to believe would have at once felt that his theory was ruined by this single scripture, which cannot be broken. Besides, one might wonder that he did not fear to insult those of whom the Lord said to Paul at this very time, "I have much people in this city." No one doubts that, spite of apostolic vigilance, wood, hay, and stubble might be introduced; but I think every brother of sense will admit that to baptize people avowedly without faith is not the way to guard the house of God from such a danger.

Here too I must supply the omission of Lydia in Acts 16: 14, 15, whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul before she was baptized with her house. How can such accumulated proofs of his error be got rid of by an honest man? So, when baptized, "she besought us saying, If ye *have judged* (κεκρίκατε) me to be faithful to the Lord;" it was not faithfulness, the fruit of faith, given after her baptism, but contrariwise their conviction of her faithfulness implied in their baptizing her.

We have next passages from the Epistles; and first Romans 6: 3, 4. "Here we have the order of

the commission and the practice of Peter in Acts 2 maintained by the Spirit of God, showing again how exceptional was the case of Cornelius. The so-called believer's baptists [a very odd phrase indeed] hold that one must have Christ and must have died with Him before baptism: whereas the Holy Ghost teaches that one must be baptized in order to get to Christ. . . It is true that many have received Christ and His death before they have been baptized, but then our question is, What is God's order? All those whom God in eternity has given to Christ shall come unto Him: if therefore they will not come in God's order, then God must go out of His order and take them to Himself; and this, blessed be His name, He has done, which is but a further manifestation of His love and grace" (pp. 11, 12). To my mind the Lord's commission, Peter's practice, and Paul's doctrine chime admirably together; but as we have seen that the writer mistook totally the first and second, so it remains to be shown that he does not understand, and of course misuses, the third. If the Baptists simply held that an adult must be accepted as converted, repentant and believing in order to baptism, they would take ground not to be shaken; if the writer simply asserted that there is an administration of christian blessing which the believer enters by baptism, he too would have confessed a truth which Baptists never put forth as far as I know. But in trying to follow another (who indeed is "very greatly taught in the word"), but unhappily without any proper understanding of the matter, he has really fallen into errors fatal to any man's testimony, whether in preaching or in teaching. Till one is baptized, one does not, properly speaking, profess Christ or Christianity; if true believers then, we thus come into its special blessings, one of which is to have died with Christ. Nothing can be more palpably erroneous than that "baptism is then quite a subjective thing." Such indeed is the notion of the Baptists who reduce baptism to signify the state of the baptized. The truth is that both baptism and the Lord's supper are objective: whether there is any subjective reality depends on the faith of the recipients. And I affirm that all scripture proves that the adult ought to believe in Christ before he is baptized; and that the author's scheme is nothing better or else than a deliberate baptizing of natural men if not hypocrites under the awful pretension that such is God's order! It is in truth an order completely set aside by the uniform testimony of His word. This in my judgment "is very solemn" for the writer, and serious enough for all who for other reasons might essay to make light of it. It is not a casual statement; it is his settled doctrine, which all who read his tract must know full well that he intends, if he is to be regarded as responsible for his language. "Scripture" NEVER "teaches baptism unto Christ, who is the life, in order to get life" (p. 13), but on the contrary invariably shows that persons having life were baptized to Christ, who died, in order sacramentally to have part with Him in His death. The author holds decidedly false doctrine on a capital truth of God.

As to 1 Corinthians 10 the apostle warns how outward signs might be abused to self-deception, as well as to deceive others. But on the writer's scheme no provision should be against bringing in "lifeless professors" for in the very same page he teaches (and affirms most mistakenly that scripture teaches) baptism in order to get life. Were his eyes holden that he should not see how completely his notion is guarded against by "the solemn caution" of this epistle? To say that the house of God in Old Testament times and His house in the New must be the same in such respects as scripture does not affirm is pure assumption. That we are admonished by the apostle to beware of the sins of Israel or kindred evils is most true and salutary.

Galatians 3: 27. "Here again baptism is before the reception or the putting on of Christ — or rather, it is the initiatory act." So says the tract in the teeth of the text, which declares that, as baptism is to Christ, so not the law but Christ is put on. How "our so-called baptist brethren would have it" I do not know; but I am sure that the writer does say at least as wrongly as they in words, and worse than they in doctrine. The truth is that the verse teaches nothing about *before* or *after*, but rather, to my thinking, excludes such thoughts by identifying the putting on Christ with baptism to Him. In fact, as

far as the sign goes, only the baptized have put Him on; but the receiving of Christ as life is another affair, as to which the tract from beginning to end is an incessant jumble of darkness and error. Scripture shows that believers only were contemplated for baptism, though a Simon Magus or other false professors might creep in unawares. The tract consecrates their entrance by denying it to be God's order that men should first believe. How it could be said that they were afterwards to believe, unless baptism act *ex opere operato*, would perplex any to explain.

Ephesians 4: 4-6. The writer's use of this (pp. 15, 16) halts miserably, because the third sphere is not merely larger than that of the body or of profession, which is allowed, but also more intimate as regards the saints. It is false therefore to say that it is heathen or Unitarian ground. And, whatever people may reason, it must be owned that it is somewhat harsh to place infants on the ground of profession. It is a great mercy that the Son can and does quicken before we enter the arena of His Lordship. He was distinctly set forth as Lord to the Jews by Peter for them to receive, and in fact they *did* receive the word to that effect, before they were baptized. Is the writer in earnest? One might almost imagine him to be a Baptist in disguise who wished to serve his party by pleading so absurdly against them.

So again on Colossians 2: 12, his question ("Is the raising through the faith of the operation of God before or after the baptism?") may be left without notice.

As for 1 Peter 3: 21, he says, "here I must freely confess my ignorance with reference to the answer of a good conscience." It seems to me that such an acknowledgement loses its worth somewhat from being immediately followed by a valiant argument for the old point. "The most intelligent of Bible students own it to be a most difficult scripture; one thing is certain, the good conscience is *after* the baptism, and by the resurrection" (p. 17). Nor can I admit the text to be so difficult, more particularly when you accept the true force of ἐπερώτημα which decidedly means "question" rather than "answer," "inquiry after," or "the thing requested." A conscience when awakened of God seeks and finds this in His righteousness, and hence one is baptized to all that it wants in being baptized to Christ. Thus the apostle does not hesitate to say, "which figure, (ὁ ἀντίτυπον), baptism, saveth . . . . by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It is here again no question of repentance or of quickening by faith, but of the new blessings vouchsafed on condition of Christ's name. One can then take the place of death in baptism, because His resurrection has given another place far better; one enters thus into God's mind according to Christ's death, but thus only in virtue of His resurrection. Hence too the force of "saveth" here as in Acts 11: 14 the latter being the truth, the former the sign of professing it. The so-called Baptists seldom if ever understand "salvation;" but neither does this tract which ridicules the idea of life before death; whereas nothing is more certainly true and scriptural, while his own thought is both unintelligent and a cheat of the enemy.

I conclude therefore that every scripture, without one exception (and it is childish to think there can be one as to the foundations of truth) is dead against the notion of baptizing faithless disciples as God's order for such as hear the gospel. If not His order, whose order is it? and who has guided in this systematic perversion of the written word? Certainly not the Spirit of truth.

As to the appended "Word on Infant Baptism," I may be the briefer (though I do not think his reasoning solid) because this not the object of animadversion but the avowed opening the door of baptism to known unbelievers, and this (must I not call it?) impiety styled the order of God, whose grace bears with those who enter as believers!

1. Romans 6 does not contemplate infants. It is straining the word to bring them in here. So, in Mark 16, they are not objects of testimony; and hence the damning of unbelievers does not apply to

them.

2. If Timothy from a child knew the sacred letters, there is no reason why children, especially of Christians, should not. *He* certainly was not then baptized.

3. If "holy" in 1 Corinthians 7: 14 must mean baptized and "in the house," how comes the unbelieving wife, "sanctified" in the brother, to be left on unholy ground? So at least sober paedobaptists have hitherto thought: perhaps the writer goes all lengths, and will have her inside too.

4. The tract confounds "*of such* is the kingdom" with "*theirs* is the kingdom." Compare Matthew 5: 3, 10 with Matthew 19: 14. I should have thought too that the notion of circumcising the males being replaced by the baptism of all infants might have been left with those who make the Lord's-day to be the Christian sabbath.

5. The vagueness of "the house" just suits one who has got nothing to the point; and the argument about children going to heaven after death as a ground of reception here goes too far; for the same principle would forbid the rejection of the grossest offenders, of there was the least hope that they might be saved in the day of the Lord.

W. K.

P.S. I hear the tract is withdrawn, after being sent far and wide. This is not enough. False doctrine must be confessed, not merely withdrawn.