

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

NO. 381

A SERMON DELIVERED ON TUESDAY EVENING, APRIL 9, 1861,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also you are risen with Him through the
 faith of the operation of God who has raised Him from the dead.”
 Colossians 2:12.*

IT is the firm belief of almost all Christian people that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, before He left the earth, instituted two ordinances, namely, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper—ordinances which were to be observed by His disciples throughout every age on to the end of the world. Perhaps, indeed, I ought to say that all Christian people without any exception whatever, acknowledge the appointment to which I have just referred. Even the Society of Friends, although it rejects the outward and visible signs, nevertheless believes in those great principles which those signs are intended to symbolize, viz., the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the communion of the soul with Christ.

By almost all Christians in every age of the world, the observance of the outward sign as well as the recognition of the inward grace has been regarded as part of the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. On this occasion we have to do only with the ordinance of Baptism and to this I wish to draw your candid and careful attention. The ground upon which this ordinance is founded is the command of our Savior addressed to His disciples just before He ascended to Heaven when He said, “Go you, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Now if this is a command of Christ, (and I am not aware that the genuineness of the passage in which it appears has ever been called into question), then, of course, it is the duty of all Christian people according to their convictions as to the nature and meaning of this command to observe and to maintain it on to the end of time.

I think it may also be asserted that with the exception of the Society of Friends, all Christians regard the ordinance of Baptism as one in which water is to be employed in some way or other and very rightly so, because if Baptism is altogether inward and spiritual—the Baptism of the Holy Spirit—then we must believe that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a Baptism which one man cannot administer to another. The very fact that the Baptism mentioned in the Scripture is a Baptism which one man *can* administer to another, is sufficient to prove that in this Baptism there is some outward, visible, material rite, ceremony, or ordinance which Christian people are to observe.

Thus far, with the exception of the Society of Friends, I believe we are all agreed that the ordinance of Baptism does imply the use and application of water in some way or other. So far we all, or nearly all, travel together. But at this point, the body of Christians to which we belong feel compelled to pursue a different course from that which is adopted by their Brethren. The very name we bear indicates that there is something or other in connection with the ordinance of Baptism in which we do not agree with the great majority of Christian people. And for the information of such as may not be thoroughly well informed upon this point, (and I by no means cast the slightest slur or rejection on any man’s intelligence if I suppose him to be a little uninformed upon this point, for very extensive ignorance with regard to it prevails) I shall in a very few words try to explain the difference or differences which exist—between us and other Christians upon this matter.

The majority of Christian people believe that so far as the outward rite is concerned, the conditions of the ordinance are fulfilled when water, in however small a quantity, is poured or sprinkled upon the candidate. We, on the other hand, believe that the outward conditions of the ordinance are *not* fulfilled unless the candidate is wholly immersed in water. Again, (and this is by far the most important point of difference), the very great majority of Christian people think infant children are fit and proper subjects for this ordinance. We, on the other hand, believe that none are fit and proper subjects for the ordinance of Baptism, excepting such as really believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and their King.

You will perceive that the difference resolves itself into two questions—a question with regard to the *mode* of this ordinance and a question with reference to the *subjects*. These two questions, “How ought Baptism to be administered?” and, “to whom ought Baptism to be administered?”—these are the questions to which we in our consciences feel compelled to offer answers which differ very materially from those which are given by other Christian people. Again let me explain this matter and set in as plain terms as possible. We believe that this ordinance should never be administered apart from the entire immer-

sion of the candidate in water and we also believe that none should be candidates for this ordinance excepting those who avow their faith in Christ.

And here let me observe that the very common notion that we are in the habit of practicing adult Baptism is utterly a mistake. We do not contend for the Baptism of adults. We contend for the Baptism of *believers*. Show us a child however young who believes in Christ and we gladly accept him. But if a man as old as Methuselah were to come to us in unbelief, we should say to him, “Sir, your age certainly entitles you to our respect, but it gives you no manner of claim to Baptism as ordained by Jesus Christ.”

But now, perhaps, someone will exclaim, perhaps in scorn, perhaps in great surprise, “Who are you that you presume to differ from the general verdict of the Christian world? Who are you that you so pertinaciously maintain these crotchety notions of yours, when all the world is against you and when there is not only the decision of the Church of Rome, against which we should ourselves rebel, but the voice of the Church of England, the voice of the Church of Scotland the voice of the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterians, the Methodists and the Congregationalists, all against you and the most able Divines of the Christian world all testifying that you are in error? Who are you, that you should thus set up your opinions against everybody else? Call a solemn assembly—canvass the Christian world and certainly for one hand held up in favor of your opinions there will be a thousand held up to their decided and utter condemnation.”

Well, we do not choose to put it to the vote in this way. We have not such entire faith in the infallibility of majorities as to submit our religious convictions to any such tribunal. If the Copernican system of astronomy had been put to the vote two hundred and fifty years ago, it would have had a smaller minority than our views would have if put to the vote now. If the doctrine of justification by faith had been put to the vote four hundred years ago, the “Nos” would have had it. If the Truth of Christianity were now submitted to the vote of the entire world, there would be somewhere about five hundred *millions* against it. And further, let the voters be all Christian people, let the suffrage be confined to those who really believe in Christ and then if you as a Church of England man, or you as a Methodist, or you as a Congregationalist, or you as a Presbyterian, submit your views of Church-government and some other things, depend upon it you would as certainly be defeated as we should be if we submitted Baptism to the decision of such a council as that.

I hope that no one is so silly as to suppose that we are necessarily in error because we are in the minority—for let this be borne in mind—especially by the worshipper of majorities, that every great Truth was at one time held by a very small minority, if indeed it is not held by a small minority now. Every great Truth, whether in the province of religion, or in the domain of science, or in the region of politics, is at first and for a very long time held by small minorities. And in all the currency of Proverbs, there is no more pernicious maxim than that, “what everybody says must be true.”

But of course you will ask our reasons for maintaining this opinion. I think we have just as good a right to ask your reasons for maintaining the opposite opinion. Galileo had just as good a right to ask his opponents why they believed the world did not move, as they to ask him why he believed it did. However you ask for our reasons and I shall endeavor to give those reasons as clearly and as briefly as I can. We ought to have good reasons, because I can assure you it has never been much to our secular comfort and advantage that we hold those views. These views have never done us very much good, considered in a merely secular or worldly sense. We are not bound to them by any golden chain. They have not been made plain and clear and attractive to us by rich benefices and comfortable livings.

Our opinions are not endowed with prelaties and pretender stalls, with manses and glebes and royal bounties. Thank God, whatever people may choose to say of us, they cannot say we are Baptists for the love of filthy lucre. One thing is certain, “the root of all evil” is not likely to draw much nourishment from the soil of Baptist ministerial stipends. We must of course state our reasons and I say they ought to be somewhat substantial reasons. Well, then, we go on this principle mark you—that the only appeal is to the Word of God.

This is a principle in which every holy and sound-hearted Protestant must agree with us. It is his principle as much as ours and it is the only principle that will save him from all the errors and superstitions of Romanism. So that, taking the matter into the court of God’s Word only, it signifies very little to us what may have been said by such-and-such a council, or such-and-such a Church, or such-and-such a reverend father—it greatly simplifies the matter when it’s understood that we intend to submit this question to the Word of God and to the Word of God only.

And I say to every Protestant here that he must accept the principle and act upon it. If he begins to refer to fathers and churches and councils, well then, let him take care. He may rely upon it—on such a principle he will not be able to stand for one moment. If he thinks with such weapons to vanquish us, let him rest assured that he will very soon be vanquished himself

by the same. It may be that the charge from such ordinance shall destroy us, but depend upon it, the recoil will destroy the man who has the temerity to fire it.

This principle, then, will be agreed in by every Protestant, excepting those who in these days are beginning to protest Scripture itself. But every sound-hearted, honest-minded Protestant will go with us in saying that the Word of God is the only tribunal to which we can go. This being the case, let us see how the matter stands.

It is alleged by us, then, that in the ordinance of Baptism the candidate should be wholly immersed in water. And now, if we were disposed and if we recognized any other authority than Scripture, we might refer to the law of the Church of England, which is most distinctly to the effect that excepting in cases of certified weakness, immersion shall be the mode of administering this ordinance and the Church of England man, at all events, has nothing to say against the adoption of this practice. It is his practice as much as ours. It is his law as much as ours. His prayer book tells him we are right.

The large fonts, three feet in diameter, which he sees in so many parish churches, tell him we are right. And he knows that in this respect we are the only faithful Church of England people in this land. We might also refer to the testimony of the ancient Church and the practice of the olden time, with regard to which it may be said with perfect certainty that in the first ages *immersion* was the commonly accepted mode. But of course we appeal to the Scriptures and appealing to the Scriptures, we find that Baptism is, as our text informs us, a burial and resurrection with Christ—that it is a sign and symbol of the believer's participation in Christ's burial and resurrection—and this, I think as plainly as possible, shows us what the mode was in ancient times.

This, indeed, is generally admitted by Divines who still maintain that this mode is not binding upon Christians at the present time. But surely, if Baptism is to be a representation of burial and resurrection there must be something in the ordinance itself which shall be suggestive of such a Truth. And then again, we appeal to the meaning of the word. This word Baptism has not been translated in our Scriptures excepting in one or two instances, in which it appears in the form of the word "wash" or "washing," and in these cases the idea of immersion, if not absolutely required, is at all events perfectly admissible and involves no incongruity. And if you search the Scriptures through you will not find a single passage in which this word, whether it is employed literally or figuratively, does not suggest, or may not suggest the idea of immersion.

When we consider that Philip and the eunuch "went down both of them into the water." That our Savior "went up straightway out of the water" after John had baptized Him. That John "was baptizing near Salim because there was much water there," I think it is very evident that something more than aspersion, or pouring of water must be implied. And if we consult trustworthy authorities for the meaning of this word we shall find that in all cases it either may or must imply the idea of immersion. I lately read a very valuable paper by a most scholarly Divine who tells us that he has thoroughly investigated every instance in which the word can be found whether in the fathers or in the classics.

He gives us upwards of two hundred cases in the great majority of which the word must mean immersion and in every one of which it may have and probably really has, that signification. Indeed, almost all scholarly men are agreed that this is the meaning of the word and not only so, but also that this was the mode that was adopted in the Apostolic age. These things are not disputed, or are scarcely disputed. Men do ask why should you adhere to this mode? And that is a question we shall have to consider presently. But they scarcely dispute anywhere that this mode was ordained by Christ and practiced in the Apostolic age. And therefore, if you ask, "Why do you immerse in Baptism?" I say because Baptism must, in the very nature of things, be a representation setting forth figuratively the burial and resurrection of Christ and because to immerse and to immerse only, is the meaning of this word baptize.

But again, our more important difference with our Christian Brethren is that we decline to accept as candidates for the ordinance all but those who avow their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now here, although the practice of Christendom is very much against us, I think that even in that practice there are some points that tell very strongly in our favor. For example Baptism is called a Sacrament. This word is scarcely recognized among us I believe, but still let us examine it. Baptism is regarded as a Sacrament. What is a Sacrament? I suppose it is an oath. Now would you administer an oath to an infant child? Is there common sense in such a procedure as that? You would provoke laughter if you were to take your infant child before a Justice of the Peace and there administer to it an oath to the effect that he should to the end of his days be a faithful subject and servant of the queen.

And is there anything more rational than this, when you take an infant child to a minister of God's Word, that to that child an oath may be administered by which it shall swear fealty to the Captain of our Salvation? But you say it is not to the infant that the oath is administered at all. It is to the sponsors. Well then, I want to know to whom the Sacrament is administered. The oath is administered to the sponsors. The Baptism is then administered to the sponsors, for the Baptism and the

oath are one. But it would seem as though the ordinance were divided. The water is administered to the child and the oath is administered to the sponsors. There is something rather like confusion here.

If Baptism is a Sacrament and a Sacrament an oath, then in administering Baptism to a child, you are administering an oath to a child. But surely every oath ought to be administered to such and such only as understand the nature of an oath and also give a solemn assent to the propositions that are embodied in it. And thus if the word Sacrament is to be applied to Baptism at all, I accept it then and I submit that it protests and protests most strongly against the administration of this ordinance to any except to those who understand and assent to the principles which are connected with it. Although our appeal is to Scripture, our Paedo-Baptist friends must really not suppose that the testimony of the Church is all in their favor, for certainly for two or three centuries if not more, the Baptism of infant children was not the general practice of the Christian church.

It was opposed by Tortellini at the latter end of the second century or the beginning of the third. And at a far later date than this, we find Baptism administered to persons of mature years. I do not wish to press into our service such cases as that of Constantine, who was baptized late in life. He was born a heathen and he appears to have continued practically a heathen of the very worst stamp to the last. The mistake in his case was not that he was baptized so late, but that he was baptized at all. As he was baptized during his last illness, his Baptism I presume was clinical and therefore administered by aspersion and those who are in favor of this mode are perfectly welcome to this sprinkled Pagan.

I am very glad that the ordinance in its Scriptural form was never disgraced by having Constantine for a subject. But we find that several of the most eminent and pious fathers of the Church were not baptized until they had arrived at maturity and were thoroughly Christian men. In the fourth century flourished Gregory of Nazianzum, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, Chrysostom and Augustine. These eminent men, who were afterwards such great theologians, were all of them the sons of Christian parents, at least of Christian mothers and yet not one of them was baptized until mature age and until each of them had strong religious convictions. In fact, none of them were baptized until they were truly converted to Jesus Christ.

The case of Gregory peculiarly in point. Gregory of Nazianzum was the son of a Christian bishop. His pious mother Nona, dedicated him to God from his very birth and yet when was he baptized? When he was thirty years old! The instance of Augustine is perhaps still more remarkable. Augustine was the object of his pious mother's deepest solicitude, his conversion was the thing nearest and dearest to her heart and yet she did not have him baptized. When he was a grown-up lad, he was attacked with a very dangerous illness and expressed a strong desire for Baptism and yet the ordinance was deferred and the great Augustine was not baptized until he was a man thirty-two years old and was fully imbued with the knowledge and spirit of the Gospel of Christ.

Now mark you, I do not say that these cases prove that there was no such thing as infant Baptism in the fourth century and it is for no such purpose I adduce them, but they do prove this—that Christian mothers such as Nona and Monica and Anthusa—Christian women of the very highest intelligence and piety, did not in that age deem it necessary that their infant children should be baptized—but they left the matter to be one of personal profession when their children should have a faith to profess.

But still we would appeal to the Scriptures and when we come to consult God's Word, strange as it may appear, there is not one passage from the beginning to the end which indicates the Baptism of any but professed believers in Christ. It is true that households were baptized and it is said that there might have infant children in those households. It is a sufficient answer to this to say that there might *not* have been any infants in those households. As to the Philippian jailer, we read that, "he believed in God with all his house." As to the house of Stephanas, we read, "they had addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints"—and, as to Lydia, there is not the slightest evidence that she was either a wife or mother.

And in fact, so far as historical narrative is concerned, there is not a single incident in Scripture that leads us to suppose that any but professed believers in Christ were baptized. It would have been very strange if such an incident had turned up anywhere, seeing that our Lord's commission runs in this order—"Go you, teach all nations, baptizing them. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." And we read that Peter says, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you." And again, he says, "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" Does it not appear that he would have anticipated an objection and would have allowed an objection if there had been no evidence of conversion to God?

And Paul says, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Is not this the work of an intelligent and believing man? Or to come to our text, Paul says that we are, "Buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also we are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised Him from the dead." The meaning of this passage

seems to be this—We are buried and risen with Christ through the *faith* of the operation of God, through *faith* in God's operation, God's work, energy and power, as manifested in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. That is to say those persons evidently were baptized, buried and raised with Christ through their faith in the fact that God's energy or power had raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The fact of Christ's resurrection is evidently attached to Baptism here.

And the Apostle Peter says, "Baptism does also now save us, (not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." That is to say, those persons who have been baptized are persons who have the answer of a good conscience towards God through Christ's resurrection—through faith in Christ's resurrection they now have the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins. And so faith in the resurrection of Christ, is represented as an essential and indeed the chief element of Christian Baptism.

These then, are some of our reasons for holding these views. If you ask why we immerse, we say, "Because this is the undisputed—or all but undisputed—sole meaning of the Word and because apart from immersion, there is no sign of burial and resurrection with Christ." And if you ask, "Why do you baptize only those that believe?" We say, "Because we can discover no trace in God's Word of the baptism of any other and we think, that as Baptism is a profession of a man's faith in Christ, this profession ought never to be made excepting by such as really are the subjects of the faith that is thus professed."

And now, if anything can be advanced to show that any other but immersion is really the meaning of the word and if any case can be had from the Scriptures, either directly or by implication, showing that any but believer's were baptized, we give this matter up. We have no interest to subserve but the cause of Truth. Of course many objections are urged against these views of ours. To some of these objections, for we shall not have time to notice them all, I shall now briefly direct attention.

I have heard it said by some and I dare say you have heard it too, that the administration of this ordinance by immersion is scarcely consistent with decency. With decency! There are some people in the world, who I suppose would advocate the omission of the first chapter from the Epistle to the Romans. There are some people who must think it would be a very proper thing to blot the Seventh Commandment from the Decalogue, for it is scarcely decent. And they ought to go in for an expurgated edition of the Sermon on the Mount and that I hope would satisfy them.

My dear Friends, Christ ordained and his Apostles practiced this ordinance of immersion—most certainly they did. There is no dispute about that. There is dispute whether the ordinance is obligatory in this form at the present day, but really there is no dispute that this was commanded and that this was done. Do you think that our Lord Jesus Christ would ever have sanctioned anything that bordered in the slightest degree on indecency? I have only one word to say to such objectors and it is this, "To the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled."

But it is a strong point, or supposed to be a strong point, that on the day of Pentecost three thousand people were baptized and how could they all be immersed. Well, why not? The only objections I can imagine are these—a lack of water and a lack of time. But to suppose that there was a deficient water supply—to suppose this from all that we know and especially from all that we do not know about ancient Jerusalem, appears to me to be a great absurdity. And as to the want of time—if the Apostles alone had baptized these three thousand, there certainly would be something rather formidable in the objection.

But it would seem that the Apostles were not in the habit of baptizing many and that they often gave this work to others—and on that occasion there might have been a hundred administrators of Baptism, those who were first baptized might baptize others and in this way the administration to the whole three thousand might very easily be accomplished before the sun went down upon the day of Pentecost. "Ah, but," say some, "there is a passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians that you cannot get over. It is said that the Israelites 'were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.' How can that be a case of immersion?"

Well, I might ask you, how could it be a case of anything else? Undoubtedly it was a case of immersion. When you think of the cloud, you must not think of a small pillar of cloud suspended high above the people and always going before them. It is written in one of the Psalms, "He spread His cloud for a covering." And they passed under the cloud, the channel of the Red Sea, with the waters piled up on either hand—this constituted the huge baptistery for the people and the cloud was the element in which they were baptized. As plainly as possible it was a case of immersion in the cloud.

But again, there are many who say, "Well, after all what does it really matter—if a man has been baptized by the Spirit of God and is really regenerated and born again and has his sins washed away by the blood of Christ—the outward and visible sign is a thing of very little importance." Well, if it is such a matter of indifference whether you adopt this or that mode, I should say it would be as well to follow the Society of Friends and adopt neither one nor the other. But you do believe there is some external rite—well, then—surely the external rite should be that which does set forth figuratively the very Truth in-

tended by the ordinance. In the language of symbols, forms are everything—forms give those symbols all their meaning and therefore it is not altogether an unimportant matter that Baptism, signifying burial and resurrection with Christ, should indicate this even in its very form and mode.

But there are also objections to our baptizing none but believers. Infants, it is said, should be baptized, not that there is any positive and direct proof of this in God's Word, still it may be inferred. For instance. "They brought infants to Jesus." What did they bring them for? That He might put his hand upon them and pray for them. Yet it is inferred by many that our Savior was in the habit of baptizing infants because they brought infants to Him that He might touch them and bless them! The opposite inference is the one I should be prepared to draw, for if our Savior were in the habit of baptizing infants the disciples certainly would not have rebuked those that brought the infants to Jesus, because such an act would have been quite a matter of course.

On this incident, Jeremy Taylor remarks, "To infer from such a passage as this that infants should be baptized only proves that there is a great want of better arguments." But again—it is said Baptism came in the place of circumcision and since infants were circumcised, infants ought to be baptized. Now it appears to me to be altogether a matter of assumption that Baptism came in the place of circumcision. There is nothing in God's Word that states this. And let me particularly call attention to this fact. It is well known to every reader of the Acts and the Epistles that a great controversy arose in the early church with reference to this matter of circumcision—certain men went down to Antioch and said to the Christians there, "Unless you are circumcised you cannot be saved."

The church at Jerusalem met to consider this matter and they sent their decision. Now, if Baptism is come in the place of circumcision, of course the way in which common sense would settle the question would be this, "No, you need not be circumcised, because you have been baptized and Baptism has come in the place of circumcision." But in the decision which the church at Jerusalem sent to the church at Antioch there is not the slightest allusion to any such substitution. Then again, Paul was perpetually arguing against those who were insisting upon the importance of circumcision—if Baptism is substituted for that institution, Paul's short and easy method of silencing every objector would have been this, "No, these people have been baptized and that is the Christian circumcision."

But what does Paul say?—we read what he says in the verse which precedes our text. He says, "In whom"—that is, in Christ—"In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." Now observe, "In whom you are circumcised with a circumcision made without hands in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." The circumcision of Christ is the Christian circumcision, is that which has come in the place of the old circumcision and this Christian circumcision is a circumcision, "made without hands."

Will any man in his senses say that this is Baptism? Christian circumcision is something that is accomplished without human agency. Baptism is not an ordinance made or administered without hands. Moreover, he says, with reference to this matter, that we are circumcised "in the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh," which is certainly the work of an intelligent, conscientious, believing and God-fearing man. In one word, if you want to know what the Christian equivalent for circumcision under the new dispensation is, it is conversion to God. It is this and it is nothing else.

If Baptism has come in the place of circumcision, on what principle then did Paul circumcise Timothy? If this idea of the substitution of Baptism for circumcision is correct, then ought not Paul to have said, "In Christ Jesus circumcision avails nothing, neither uncircumcision, but Baptism?" Ought he not to have said, "We are the circumcised—we who have been baptized"? But what he does say is this, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but the keeping of the Commandments of God," and, "We are the congregation who worship God in one Spirit and who rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

Evidently, then, those who have received the Christian circumcision are those who keep the Commandments of God, who worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus—and these conditions are certainly applicable to none excepting those who are *believers* in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore I would say there seems to be no fairness in arguing from the one institution to the other. Only consider this fact, that in a controversy which this supposed idea of Baptism having come in the place of circumcision would have settled in a moment, there is no allusion to such mode of settling the question and I think that we are led to infer, with the most absolute certainty, that it is altogether a baseless assumption that circumcision is represented by Baptism.

No, in the Christian dispensation, if there is any equivalent, any succession to the circumcision of the old covenant, it is conversion to God—it is the circumcision of the *heart*, it is the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh. *That* is the Chris-

tian circumcision. But it will be said by some, “You make a great deal too much of this ordinance of Baptism.” Well, I am free to confess that there may be here and there a good Brother who makes rather too much of this ordinance. Yet this I certainly can say, from a somewhat extensive knowledge of our denomination, that in almost every case you will find that the ordinance of Baptism is held by us in a most thorough and lowly subordination to the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the work of atonement by His sacrifice and death, to the influence and the indwelling of the Divine Spirit, to the necessity of repentance and of faith, to the importance of a life of personal holiness and to every other great principle of the holy faith which we profess.

I do not think that we are fairly charged with making too much of this ordinance. When we say of this ordinance that it regenerates the soul—when we say that herein persons are made “members of Christ, children of God and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven”—when we rush with all haste to baptize the sick and the dying and when we refuse to accord to those who die unbaptized, the rites, the decencies, the charities of Christian burial—*then* tell us, for indeed we shall deserve to be told—that we do most monstrously exaggerate the importance of this ordinance!

But you shall go through the length and breadth of this realm and you shall visit all the Baptist churches in the States of America and on the continent of Europe and nowhere will you find such sentiments or such practices prevailing among the Baptist people. I trust we make no more of this ordinance and no less than is made of it in God’s Word. We do not baptize our own infant children and this, I think, is evidence enough that we do not very grossly exaggerate the importance of this institution.

Still you say, “You do not regard it as essential to salvation and therefore why do you make this the ground of separation from your Brethren?” My dear Friend, are you a Congregationalist? You do not believe that your Congregational polity is essential to salvation—why then do you not join the Episcopal communion? Are you a Methodist? You do not think the Conference is to save your soul—why do you not return to the bosom of the Established Church? Are you a Free Church of Scotland man? You will admit that people can be saved in the old Church yet. Then why did you make such a fuss about that Disruption business? I do not blame you for the Disruption, not by any means—perhaps you did what was perfectly right.

A thing may not be essential and yet it may be very far from unimportant. We cannot but regard infant Baptism as the main root of the superstitious and destructive dogma of baptismal regeneration, to which as Protestants we are opposed. We cannot but regard infant baptism as the chief cornerstone of State Church, to which as Dissenters we are opposed. We cannot but regard infant Baptism as unscriptural and to everything that is unscriptural we, as disciples of Jesus Christ, must be opposed. And we do trust that all who differ from us and however widely they may differ, will still admit that we are only doing what is right in maintaining what we believe to be the Truth of God with reference to this matter.

Up to now it has been in disgrace and scorn and ridicule and oftentimes in persecution that these principles have been held. Up to now we have been a sect everywhere spoken against. Probably the first martyr burnt in England for religion and certainly the last, was a Baptist. And others had trials of cruel mocking and scourging, yes and of bonds and imprisonments—and became destitute, afflicted and tormented. We cannot glory in our numbers, we cannot glory in our power, we cannot glory in our wealth. But we can glory in the faith and constancy by which those who went before us were enabled by Divine grace to sustain the infliction of the most grievous wrongs—wrongs which were all the more keenly felt because they were received at the hands of fellow-Christians, fellow-Protestants and even fellow-Puritans.

Up to now we have been few in number and have been oftentimes violently and bitterly opposed—nor do I think that there is now any very brilliant prospect of our rising to denominational greatness and basking in the sunshine of popular applause. And indeed, when I see what the effect of such greatness and applause has been upon some Christian churches, I am disposed to say, “God defend us from power and popularity, for these are more dangerous foes than all the contumely and persecution and straitened circumstances with which we have had to struggle in the times gone by.”

I do hope and verily believe that we have a far purer object in view than mere denominational aggrandisement and that we shall be content, as heretofore we have been content, come evil report or good, to have the testimony of a clear conscience that according to the best of our knowledge and to the utmost of our power we have faithfully tried to maintain God’s Truth against the commandments and traditions of men.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307