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A

BRIEF VIEW
OF THE
PROPER SUBJECTS AND TRUE MODE
OF
CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

BY THE

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CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

HARDLY any subject has created more discussion in the Christian church since the Reformation than that of Baptism. It divides itself into two parts; the first relates to the proper subjects of Baptism, the second to the proper mode of its administration. I wish here to offer a plain and concise view of the subject, that may assist young persons in forming a correct opinion in regard to both these subjects of inquiry.

I. I shall first speak in regard to the proper subjects of Baptism.—And here all are agreed that adult believers, making a profession of Christianity, if they have not been baptized in infancy, are entitled to this ordinance. We hold to *believers' Baptism* as much as any other. The question in dispute is, with regard to infants. We hold that the infants of believing parents are entitled to Baptism on the faith of their parents. This the Baptists deny. It is true that we have no direct scripture declaration, saying in so many words, that children should be baptized; (neither have we any such for female communion;) yet we have what I conceive to be a full equivalent.

1. The covenant with Abraham was the same gospel covenant, under which we now live. This is evident from the whole nature and tenor of that covenant, embracing not merely the posterity of Abraham, but all nations. “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. xii. 3.) “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. xxii. 18.) The terms of that covenant were faith and obedience; the same as those of the gospel covenant. “And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Gen. xv. 6.) “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; *because thou hast obeyed my voice.*” (Gen. xxii. 18.) Hence the apostle says, “Abraham, was justified by faith.” It is true that the promised blessing was made more immediately to the posterity of Abraham, because it should be chiefly confined to them for many generations, and until the coming of the Messiah; but finally it should embrace all nations. It is therefore frequently called *an everlasting covenant*. But who are the children of Abraham? Not

merely his descendants by natural generation: but all believers, as the apostle tells us, are the children of Abraham, who is the Father of us all. (Rom. iv. 16. Gal. iii. 7.) The same apostle says, "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham." (Gal. iii. 8, 9.) Hence the apostle says again, "And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." (Gal. iii. 17.) Temporal blessings were promised under that covenant; but they were typical of spiritual blessings, which were also included. To sum up the particulars then:—The Abrahamic covenant was to *include all nations*—it was an *everlasting covenant*—the terms of it were *faith and obedience*—the promulgation of it was *preaching the gospel to Abraham*—it promised *spiritual blessings*, under the type and figure of temporal blessings—and this covenant with Abraham was *confirmed of God in Christ*, and was not *disannulled* by the giving of the law to the Israelites, four hundred and thirty years after, at Mount Sinai. Can any one doubt therefore that this is the same gospel covenant, under which we all live, *i. e.* all believers; and who are therefore the *children of Abraham, and heirs according to the promise*? It seems to me to be as plain as any thing can be, that the covenant with Abraham, was the covenant of grace—the same Gospel covenant confirmed of God in Christ, under which all believers are at this day. If this be not so, the apostle, to my mind, has reasoned very obscurely in the 3d of Galatians and 4th of Romans.

2. Of that covenant, circumcision was made the external sign and seal, and was to be administered to children at eight days old. Children, under that dispensation, were thereby recognized as comprehended under that covenant; *i. e.* as being members of the visible Church of God in the world. That Abraham and his descendants in the line of Isaac and Jacob, and their posterity, the Israelites, to whom the promises were made, did constitute the visible Church of God in the world, cannot be denied; unless it be denied that the Church existed in a visible form at all, until after the coming of Christ. But surely no one will deny

this. God did not leave himself without witness. The Jewish nation was the visible Church of God in the world, from Abraham down to the coming of Christ. The martyr Stephen speaks of the *Church in the wilderness*. (Acts. vii. 38.) the Jews are very often spoken of as *God's chosen people—his heritage—his vineyard, &c.* But circumcision was the peculiar badge of that people, by which they were distinguished from the rest of the world; by which were signified and sealed to them the blessings promised in the covenant with Abraham; and by which proselytes were initiated into their communion. The idea that some have maintained, that circumcision was *a merely national badge*, contradicts the whole tenor of Scripture on the subject, which every where represents it as a solemn and significant *religious rite*. It was instituted in the family of Abraham long before the Israelites existed as a nation. It is evident therefore, that in the visible Church, as it was established in the family of Abraham, down to the coming of Christ, children were recognized as members, and received the external sign of membership, by divine appointment at eight days old.

3. The gospel church is the same Church, only rendered more spiritual, and with some change of external rites. This is evident from many passages of scripture; nay, I might say from the whole tenor of scripture on the subject. Christ came "not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil." The corner stone of the Church is laid in Sion; *i. e.* in the Jewish church. The privileges that had been confined to the Jews are represented under the gospel, as being extended to the Gentiles. Hence the apostle says, "Ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." (Eph. ii. 13, 19, 20.) The whole Epistle to the Hebrews is designed to show that the rites of the Jewish church are abrogated, and that those of the Christian church had taken their place. But the apostle Paul puts the matter beyond all question in the 11th chapter of Romans, in which he calls the Jewish church the *good olive tree* from which some of them had been broken off, as unfruitful branches, through unbelief, and the Gentiles *grafted in, to partake*

with them the root and fatness of the olive tree. (Rom. xi. 17, &c.)

4. In the Christian church, Baptism has come in the room of circumcision; as the Lord's Supper has come in the room of the passover. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two sacraments of the Christian church, just as circumcision and the passover, were the two sacraments of the Jewish church. This is evident from the fact, that they have virtually the same meaning, and refer to the same things. The passover was typical of the very same thing, of which the Lord's Supper is commemorative: and circumcision signified the same native depravity, and need of moral purification, that are represented by Baptism. These rites of the Jewish church were attended with the shedding of blood, as most of the institutions of that comparatively dark, legal, and typical dispensation were, in anticipation of the bloody sacrifice of the cross: but Christ having come and offered himself a sacrifice *once for all*, and set up his gospel kingdom, and established his Church upon *better promises*—under a brighter, milder, and more spiritual dispensation, there is no longer occasion for bloody rites. We are told that, as an appendage to the paschal supper, as observed by the Jews in our Lord's time, they partook of a piece of bread and a cup of wine: and that also, to the rite of circumcision, administered to proselytes, they added that of Baptism, or washing with water, in token of their putting off the filthiness of heathenism, and assuming a new character. It would seem therefore that our Lord, in both cases, simply rejected the bloody parts of those rites, as inappropriate to the gospel dispensation; and substituted in their stead the unbloody parts, as they were then in common use. This seems to me to be a very easy and natural view of this subject; and hence we may understand why so little was said by way of explaining the nature of Baptism, it being a rite already in practice, and well understood, as an appendage to proselyte circumcision. Wherefore the apostle calls Baptism "the circumcision of Christ" or Christian circumcision. (Col. ii. 2.) All the early Fathers regarded Baptism as coming in the room of circumcision.

5. It follows as a necessary consequence, if our reasoning be correct, that the children of believing parents under the gospel, are to be regarded as having the same right to

Baptism, that the children of Jewish parents had to circumcision; unless their rights have been abridged, and there can be found some positive declaration to the contrary. But where is any thing like such a declaration to be found? It is certainly not to be found in the conduct of Christ towards little children. He took them up in his arms and blessed them, and said “of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat. xix. 13—15.) But some have said that the meaning of this is, that of such persons as are *like infants* in temper, disposition, &c. is the kingdom of heaven. But this interpretation cannot be maintained for two reasons. 1st. The original does not admit of this construction. It does not mean of such as are *like infants*, but of *such infants* is the kingdom of heaven: it might properly be rendered, as a similar phrase is elsewhere “*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” 2d. It is inconsistent with the scope of the passage. Christ gives it as a reason why children should be brought unto him. But his saying that the kingdom of heaven consisted of persons meek, docile, &c. like children, was no reason why infants should be brought unto him. There would be the same reason, says Mr. Henry, why *lambs and doves should be brought unto him*. Here then is a positive assertion, by the Saviour himself, that infants belong to the kingdom of heaven; that is, to the gospel Church. There is nothing like such a prohibition in the declaration of Peter on the day of Pentecost, who said, “For the promise is unto you, and *to your children.*” (Acts ii. 39.) There is no such prohibition to be found in the New Testament. If then the Abrahamic covenant was the same covenant of grace, or gospel covenant, under which we all live; and if children were included in that covenant, and commanded to be circumcised as the sign and seal of it: if the Christian church is the same with the Jewish church, only rendered more spiritual, with some change of its external forms, and if Baptism and the Lord’s Supper come in the room of circumcision and the passover; (all which, I think, has been fully proved on scripture authority;) then there was no occasion for a command to the apostles to baptize children,—they would of course, and of necessity, so understand their commission, “go teach all nations, baptizing them,” &c. When proselytes were made to the Jewish church, they received them, and both circumcised and baptized them and their children. And when the apostles

were sent out to make proselytes or converts to the Christian church, which was, and was understood to be, the same Church, with only some modification of its external rites; how could they without special instruction, refuse to receive children with their parents, as they always had done?

6. But we have what I conceive to be very satisfactory evidence, that the apostles did so understand their commission, and that when they received parents into the Church, they received and baptized their children with them. Thus we find them repeatedly baptizing whole households. Lydia was baptized and *her household*—the jailor, and *all his* straightway. Paul baptized *the household of Stephanus*. It is not indeed said that there were infants in any of these families; but the strong presumption is that there were. Where will you find three families, taking them at random, in which there are no children? Do we ever hear, in all the reports of the Baptist missionaries among the heathen, that they have baptized one household? But in the history of the apostles, in which there are but few cases of Baptism recorded, there are as many as three household Baptisms. In every case, as far as we are now capable of knowing, in which the parent or head of a family was baptized, the children or household, were also baptized. If a similar history were recorded of any missionary in a heathen land, with whose creed and practice on this subject, we were wholly unacquainted—that in performing the act of Baptism the same number of times that it is recorded of the apostles in the New Testament, (which, I think, is not more than ten,) he had baptized as many as three households, would any one doubt that he was a Pedobaptist? Would our Baptist brethren be disposed to lay claim to such a missionary?

But the passage of scripture, (1 Cor. vii. 14,) must be regarded as very decisive upon this subject. “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife; and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.” How were the children holy? Not *positively* or *personally*—the faith of one or both parents will not effect that—but *federally*, *i. e.* within the pale of God’s covenant—members of the invisible Church; and therefore entitled to Baptism. I know of no other interpretation of this text, consistent with the scope of the passage, and with the meaning of the

original words. Things and persons consecrated to God, are called holy. The people of Israel in covenant with God are called holy. The term holy is often used to express such a relation to God. (Exod. xix. 6, Deut. vii. 6, Ezra ix. 2.) Things not thus consecrated—Gentiles not thus in covenant with God, are called *common* and *unclean*. (compare Isa. xxxv. 8, and lii. 1. with Acts x. 28.) The evident meaning of the apostle then is, that the faith of either parent brought the child within the covenant—within the pale of the visible Church; and therefore federally holy—consecrated to God—and entitled to Baptism: otherwise, it was regarded as without the covenant—*unclean*—in other words a *Gentile*. And this was assigning a good and valid reason why the believing parent should not leave his or her unbelieving companion, which is the scope of the passage.

7. A very strong proof of infant Baptism we also derive from the history of the Church. If infant Baptism be not scriptural, and was not practised by the apostles; then it is an *egregious error*; and was introduced at a very early period; obtained a universal prevalence; and continued down uninterruptedly, without the least opposition, as far as authentic history gives us information on the subject, until near the time of the Reformation: nay, it continues to be practised even at the present day, by perhaps nineteen-twentieths of the Christian world. And yet we have no account of the introduction of this error, and no dispute about it by the early Fathers. The introduction of other errors is recorded, and the opposition that was made to them; but on this subject, there is a profound silence; except in regard to the fact that infant Baptism was universally practised, and held to be of apostolical origin. There was a dispute whether infants might not be baptized sooner than eight days old; the time when, under the law, circumcision was to be administered; (a plain proof that they regarded Baptism as coming in the room of circumcision;) and this question was decided by a Council held at Carthage, A. D. 253, that *they might be baptized as soon as they were born*. “From the year 400 to 1150,” says Buck, “no society of men in all that period of 750 years, ever pretended to say it was unlawful to baptize infants; and still nearer to the time of our Saviour there appears to have been scarcely any one that so much as advised the delay of infant Baptism. Irenæus, who lived

in the second century, and was well acquainted with Polycarp, who was John's disciple, expressly declares that the Church learned from the apostles to baptize children. Origen, in the third century, affirmed that the custom of baptizing infants was received from Christ and his apostles. Cyprian, and a council of ministers (held about the year 254) no less than sixty-six in number, unanimously agreed that children might be baptized as soon as they were born. Ambrose, who wrote about 274 years from the apostles, declares that the Baptism of infants had been the practice of the apostles themselves, and of the Church, till that time. "The Catholic church every where declared," says Chrysostom, in the fifth century, "that infants should be baptized; and Augustine, (in the same age,) affirmed that he never heard nor read of any Christian, catholic, or sectarian, but who always held that infants were to be baptized. They farther believed, that there needed no mention in the New Testament of receiving infants into the Church, as it had been once appointed and never repealed."

Pelagius, who flourished in the latter part of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century, was among the most learned men of his day, and had travelled very extensively over a greater part of the Christian world, so that if there had been any sect however obscure, or even an individual of any note, who had denied the doctrine of infant Baptism, he could scarcely have failed to know it. And from the doctrine which he held in regard to original sin—that infants are born pure and innocent; or, in modern language upon the subject, *without moral character*—he was under strong inducements to deny the doctrine himself; insomuch that he was charged with doing so. But he indignantly repelled the charge as an injurious slander. "Men slander me," says he, "as if I denied the sacrament of Baptism to infants. *I never heard of any, not even the most impious heretic, who denied Baptism to infants.*"

8. It seems to be reasonable and natural, that while children are young, and incapable of choosing and acting for themselves, their parents should choose and act for them. This is done in all the ordinary interests and concerns of life; and why not so in religion? The institution of such a rite as Baptism, by which parents may publicly and solemnly offer up their children to God, have the seal

of his covenant put upon them, acknowledge his right to them, and their obligations to bring them up for him, seems to be in perfect conformity with the best feelings of every pious parent's heart. It may be asked, what good Baptism can do the child? It would be a sufficient answer to say, "It is God's own institution, and He will bless it." It might with the same propriety be asked, what good it could do the child to be circumcised at eight days old? It was asked in the apostle's day, "what profit is there of circumcision?" And he answers, "much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." So Baptism is designed to secure to children religious discipline, christian instruction, the watch, and care, and prayers of the Church, &c. And where do we find children most carefully taught and instructed in the doctrines and duties of religion; and trained up in the way in which they should go? Not, I think, among Antipedobaptists; who are generally, if I mistake not, notoriously lax in family discipline, and the religious instruction of children. Nay, some of this denomination do actually condemn the religious discipline and education of children, as calculated to put knowledge into the head, with which they are likely to be satisfied, without obtaining grace in the heart. "Let them alone," say they, "and then when God puts his grace into their hearts, *they will know it.*" On the proper use and improvement of the ordinance, see *Bradbury on Baptism*. It seems to me therefore, that the practice of Pedobaptism is abundantly sustained by Scripture, the history of the Church, as well as by the reason and nature of the case.

II. 1. I now proceed to consider the mode of Baptism; and shall attempt to prove that "dipping the person into the water is not necessary: but that Baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person." It is not denied that Baptism by immersion is valid Baptism; but it is denied that immersion is the only valid mode. We hold that the application of water to a fit subject, by a properly authorised minister of the gospel, in the name of the sacred Trinity, is Christian Baptism, without regard to the manner in which the water is applied, whether by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. We believe that the mode of Baptism has been purposely left indefinite; as the modes and forms of external worship, in the New Testament, generally have been. It is not consistent with

the spirit of the New Testament dispensation, to lay great stress upon external forms and ceremonies. It was otherwise under the Old Testament dispensation; because that was typical. Then, external forms and ceremonies were significant as the types and figures, or shadows, as the apostle calls them, of good things to come. To change their form would have been to destroy their typical significance, and to render them nugatory, as to the end designed by them. Hence Moses was admonished of God "when he was about to make the tabernacle; for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." (Heb. viii. 5.) Forms and ceremonies, therefore, under that dispensation, were particularly and precisely prescribed and defined. But under the gospel it is not so. The whole stress is laid upon the spirit, the principle, the motive: and forms and ceremonies are very little accounted of, and in no case particularly and definitely prescribed. So it is with regard to the other Christian ordinance—the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We are not told how often it was to be administered; whether once a week, as seems to have been the practice of the apostles; or once a month, as some churches have judged most expedient; or once or twice a year, as others. We are not told whether the wine was to be sweet, as some of late have concluded, or fermented; whether pure, or diluted with water, as others think. With regard to the bread to be used; it is not decided whether it should be unleavened, as was doubtless that first used at its institution, and which some think should still be used; or leavened, as is perhaps more common at the present day. The time of day is not prescribed as was that of the passover; and it was first instituted in the night. The posture in which it is to be received is not pointed out: whether sitting, as is common with us; or kneeling, as some think most proper; or reclining, as Christ and his apostles probably first received it. And we are nowhere informed whether women were entitled to this ordinance; but are left to infer their right from the nature of the case. The same might be said of the external forms of religious worship. The apostle Paul corrects some abuses and irregularities that had sprung up in the Church at Corinth; such as, several persons speaking at the same time—women speaking in the Church—irregularities in partaking of the Lord's Supper, &c.; but there is no prescribed form of public worship any where laid down in the New Testa-

ment. Can it then be reasonably supposed that in the single case of Baptism, so great stress should be laid on the external mode and form of it?—that in this one instance, the spirit of the gospel dispensation should be so far departed from, as to make the validity of the ordinance depend on the particular mode of its administration? I cannot think so. The mode of administering Baptism, as well as the other external forms of Christian worship, as I conceive, come under the general rules of the apostle—“Let all things be done decently and in order”—“Let all things be done unto edification”—and may therefore be modified according to the particular circumstances in which men are placed.

2. Christianity was designed to be an universal religion, extending to every nation and tribe of men on the earth; and therefore adapted to every condition of our globe, and to all the varieties and habits of human society. Baptism by immersion, in many parts of the world, would be very inconvenient. In very high latitudes, it would be impracticable to obtain water of a proper temperature, through the greater part of the year at least, without applying to it artificial warmth. In many regions of the world it would be very difficult, if not impracticable, to obtain a sufficient quantity of water. In the sandy deserts of Africa, the faithful Mussulman, in the absence of water, performs his prescribed ablutions with sand. But in Baptism, if the element might be changed, it would be rather difficult, as well as dangerous, to immerse in sand. And in many feeble states of bodily health, immersion in water would be attended with no little danger to the individual, and in some cases perhaps, produce instant death. With *our* habits of society, Baptism by immersion is attended at times, with no little inconvenience—requiring a change of raiment, a dressing room, sufficient quantity and depth of water, &c., not to say, that it places the female subject in an attitude, not very congenial with our common sense of delicacy. Unless a baptistery be provided, which cannot commonly be done; it prevents that solemn ordinance being performed in the church, where we think all public acts of religious worship should be performed. There must be a resort to some stream or pond of sufficient capacity and depth, attended often with no little disorder and confusion. But I will not say all on this subject that I think might be said. It is not denied that Baptism by immersion was practised at a very early period in the east; but with them it was attended with much less inconvenience

than with us. Their climate was mild most of the year round; they wore loose garments, went with naked feet, or only with sandals, and were in the common habit of bathing.

3. It is acknowledged on all hands that Baptism is emblematical, and is intended to represent moral purification—the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ in procuring the pardon of sin, and the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. But it is evident that the idea of moral purification may be as well represented by sprinkling or pouring, as by immersion. And a small quantity of water will be as significant, *as an emblem*, as a large quantity. The quantity of water effects nothing towards the end designed. If indeed the design were “the putting away of the filth of the flesh,” which the apostle says, *it is not*, (1 Pet. iii. 21,) the thing would be quite otherwise. The quantity of water would then be a material point; and it might be necessary not only to plunge the body into it, but then to rub and wash it well. But as Baptism is only emblematical of moral purification, and the “answer of a good conscience before God,” in having obeyed his commandments; the quantity of water is wholly immaterial—a drop is as good as an ocean.

But how is the blood of Christ represented as being applied to the sinner’s heart? *Always by sprinkling.* Having our hearts *sprinkled* from an evil conscience,” says the apostle, “and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb. x. 22.) “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and *sprinkling* of the blood of Christ.” (1 Pet. i. 2.) Here are the two sources of moral purification; the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. By the one, comes the pure heart; by the other, cancelled guilt. The blood of Christ is called the blood of *sprinkling*, that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.” The blood of the paschal lamb, a type of Christ, was to be *sprinkled* on the door posts of their houses. So the apostle tells us, (Heb. ix. 19—22) that “when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and *sprinkled* both the book and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he *sprinkled* likewise with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged

with blood: and without shedding of blood there is no remission." One source of that moral purification then, of which Baptism is the external sign, viz. the blood of Christ, seems uniformly represented as being applied by sprinkling. Isaiah in reference to the same thing, speaking of the extension of Christ's kingdom, says, "So shall he *sprinkle* many nations." (Isaiah lii. 15.) And Ezekiel, speaking of the restoration of the Jews, says, that they shall be cleansed from all their filthiness and idols;—and how? by immersion? Not at all, "I will *sprinkle* clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." (Eze. xxxvi. 25.) Here is the idea of cleansing, as it is all along, and yet it is by sprinkling. And I have no doubt that there is an allusion here to water Baptism.

But how is the Spirit, which is the other source of that moral purification of which Baptism is the external sign, represented as being applied? The Holy Spirit is every where represented as being *poured out, shed down, or distilled* like rain or dew. The texts of Scripture to this effect are very numerous, and familiar to every one, and I need not recite them. Now if there is to be any similarity or agreement between the sign and the thing signified—between Baptism with water, and spiritual Baptism, or that moral purification effected by the blood and spirit of Christ—between having "our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water," as the apostle expresses it; surely Baptism should be performed by sprinkling or pouring, and not by immersion. And the apostle John tells us that the Spirit, the water, and the blood *agree in one*. They agree in the moral purification of the heart: the Spirit effecting it by regeneration, the blood by its atoning efficacy, and the water representing and sealing it as an external sign—and should they not agree in the manner of their application?

4. But we shall be told that this is all speculation; that we must go to the very words of institution, and to the practice of the apostles, to ascertain the mode of Baptism—That Christ is king in Zion, and head over his church, and has a right therefore to prescribe laws for its government: and that it is our duty to *obey*, and not to decide or conjecture what is right and fit in the matter. "To the law, and to the testimony."—To this I say *agreed*: and our appeal shall now be directly to that quarter.

"Baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the

Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Here, we are told, the matter is decided—that the original Greek word βαπτίζω, means to *immerse*, and *nothing else*. Now if this be so, dispute about the mode is at an end. If the word admits of no other meaning but immersion, then there can be no other mode. But this is a mere begging of the question, and taking for granted the thing in dispute. What authority has any one for saying that the word has no other meaning? If we look into Lexicons, we can find as many as five or six different meanings to the word; and if we look at the use of it, we find many cases, in which it cannot possibly mean immersion. In classic use, it sometimes means to *stain*, to *dye*, to *soak*, to *imbue*, to *wash*, to *cleanse*: this may be by dipping, sprinkling, or pouring. Origen, a Greek Father, and one of the most learned men of his day, says, “Elias did not baptize the wood on the altar, which was to be washed, but ordered another to do it,” &c. Here is an allusion to the four barrels of water which the prophet directed should be *poured on* the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. (1 Kings xviii. 33.) Origen regarded baptism as equivalent to *washing*, and that by *pouring* the water on. Athanasius used the word (ραντιζομενον) *sprinkled*, as clearly equivalent to (βαπτίζομενον) *baptized*. The *baptism* of tears and blood, was a favourite phraseology with the early Christians; but surely this was not by immersion. “An ancient oracle, quoted by Sydenham, runs thus;—Ασχος βαπτίζε· δυναί δε τοι εθεμεις εστι—*i. e.* Baptize him as a bottle; but it is not lawful to immerse, or wholly to plunge him under the water. Here *baptize* is put in opposition to *immerse*, and cannot mean the same thing.” In the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament, made more than 200 years before Christ, the word βαπτίζω, is often used as equivalent to the word λασω, to wash. When the body of Nebuchadnezzar is said to be wet with the dew of heaven, the Septuagint has it, *baptized*; but surely not by immersion. John the Baptist says, (Matt. iii. 11.) “I indeed baptize you with water, but he that cometh after me, is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” If we look in Acts ii. 1—4. we shall see how this was done—‘And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting—(*i. e.* the sound filled the house.) And there appeared cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon

each of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues; as the Spirit gave them utterance." Here the appearance of fire sat upon their heads, and the Spirit filled them, but they were immersed in neither—there was nothing like immersion in the case.

How would it sound to speak of being *immersed in the Holy Ghost and in fire*? If John's disciples had understood the word to mean nothing else but immersion, would they not have been startled at such an expression? But if βαπτίζω ὑμας ἐν ὕδατι, means, I immerse you *in water*, βαπτισεῖ ὑμας ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ, must mean, he shall baptize you *in the Holy Ghost and in fire*—the construction is precisely the same.

Christ calls his last sufferings a Baptism; but there was nothing like immersion in the case. He bore the curse of the law, and the wrath of God; but that is always said to be *poured out*. The Israelites are said to have been baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (1 Cor. x. 2.) But there could be no immersion there, either in the cloud or in the sea: for it is said that the pillar of cloud stood behind them, between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and that they went through the sea on *dry ground*. The Egyptians were indeed immersed, and sunk *like lead in the mighty waters*. But the Israelites might have been sprinkled with the spray from the sea which stood as a wall on each side: and it would seem that they were sprinkled with rain at the same time; for the psalmist, speaking of this same thing, says, "The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook." (Psa. lxxvii. 17, 18.) Here then Baptism cannot mean immersion.—In Mark vii. 2—4. it is said, "And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not." In the original Greek it is, except they *Baptize*, (βαπτισωνται,) they eat not. But how did the Pharisees, and all the Jews *Baptize* when they came from the market? Certainly not by immersing themselves in water; but by *washing their hands*, as it is said in the preceding verse, "except they wash their hands oft, they eat not." Here baptizing is equivalent to washing, and neither by immersion.

In Matthew xv. 2. we read, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread." In Luke xi. 38, it is said that when a certain Pharisee who had asked Jesus to dine with him, saw him sit down to meat, "he marvelled that he had not first washed, (in the original, baptized,) before dinner." What! did the Pharisee marvel that he had not first plunged himself into water before dinner? No, certainly: but that he had not first washed his hands according to the tradition of the Elders, as mentioned in Matthew.— In Mark vii. 4. we read, "And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables," or couches, as the original properly means. And here the word rendered *washing* is in the original *baptizing*. And how did they baptize their cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and couches? Some of them by immersion, perhaps; but certainly not all. We find provision made for these various washings or baptisms of the Jews at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. (John ii. 6.) "And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece." Here was an ample provision for washing cups, pots, &c. and the hands and feet of the guests, but certainly not for immersing their bodies in water.

In Hebrews ix. 10. we read of "diverse washings and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation;"—in the original, *διαφοροις Βαπτισμοις*, *diverse Baptisms*. The adjective *διαφοροις*, means *different, of various kinds, dissimilar*. These diverse washings or baptisms, doubtless included all the different ablutions, and ceremonial cleansings prescribed in the Mosaic law; and these were performed in diverse ways. How some of them were performed, the apostle goes on to tell in verse 13—"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, *sprinkling* the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more the blood of Christ," &c. And also in verse 19 and following—"For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and *sprinkled* both the book and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover, he *sprinkled* likewise with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry." It is evident from the connexion and scope of this portion of Scripture, that the apostle

designed to include these *sprinklings* in the *διαφοροὶς βαπτισμοῖς*, *diverse baptisms* mentioned in verse 10.

After all this, can any one say that the word *βαπτίζω*, means to immerse, and *nothing else*? The general idea is washing or cleansing; but as it regards the mode, we could scarcely find a more indefinite word. If the mode be so material—an *essential point*, why has it been left so indefinite, that perhaps nineteen-twentieths of the Christian world at the present day, and ever since the days of the apostles, have believed that Baptism by sprinkling or pouring was valid Baptism? Is it so, that nineteen-twentieths of the Christian world have not been able to arrive at the truth on this subject; and are therefore actually out of the visible church, and without valid ordinances? Is it true that the Baptist denomination, which had its origin about 300 years ago, (as I believe history will fully prove,) is the only true visible Church of God in the world? I cannot think so.

5. Since the word itself does not determine the mode of Baptism, let us look at the practice of the apostles, and see if we can find any thing there that will determine it to signify immersion only. First, however, I must notice the Baptism of John. But here it must be observed that the Baptism of John was not Christian Baptism. John's Baptism formed as it were, a connecting link between the Jewish and Christian church, but belonged properly to neither. If therefore we know certainly John's mode of Baptism, and in what manner the Saviour was baptized, it would not certainly determine the mode of Christian Baptism. The Baptism of John was local and temporary, intended only to prepare the way for the Messiah; it might therefore be very different in its mode of administration, from an institution of the Christian church, intended to be universal; adapted to every region of the earth, and to every condition of society; and to be perpetuated to the end of time.

In Matt. iii. 5, 6, we read, "Then went out to him (John) Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and *εβαπτίζοντο εν Ιορδανη*, *were baptized in Jordan.*" The same phraseology occurs, Mark i. 5. "And they were all baptized in the river Jordan." At first sight it may be thought that this determines the mode of John's Baptism. If he baptized in the river Jordan, surely it was by immersion. But this is by no means a necessary consequence. He might stand in the water, and yet baptize the multitudes that came to him, by sprinkling or pouring it on them. But the preposition

here rendered *in*, has at least sixteen different meanings in the New Testament; such as, *with, by, through, to, near, &c.* we may therefore say, *at Jordan, near Jordan, or with Jordan; i. e.* with the waters of Jordan. The same preposition is used when it is said, I baptize *with* water, but he shall baptize *with* the Holy Ghost and *with* fire. And if it determines the mode here, and we must say they were *immersed in Jordan*; then it must determine the mode there, and we must say, I immerse *in water*; but he shall immerse you *in the Holy Ghost* and *in fire*. The same preposition is used when it is said that John was baptizing *in* the wilderness; and also when it is said, he was baptizing *in* Enon, a town. But every one sees that it would be ridiculous to speak of immersing or plunging people in a wilderness, or in a town. It is plain therefore that the preposition $\epsilon\nu$ has nothing to do with the mode, but only designates, either the element, as, *with water, with fire*; or the place, as *in the wilderness, in Enon, at or near Jordan*.

From the numbers that flocked to John's Baptism, it is thought he must have performed the service in a very expeditious and summary way. It is said (Mark i. 5.) that "there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were *all* baptized of him." A judicious writer has computed that if one tenth part of this population were baptized by immersion, allowing three minutes to each individual; the Baptist must have stood eight hours in the water per day for three years, to have accomplished the work!

The Baptism of Christ is much relied upon to prove immersion, because it is said that he went up straightway out of the water. (Matt. iii. 16.) But the preposition $\alpha\pi\omicron$, here rendered *out of*, in its ordinary and proper meaning, signifies *from*; and, as I conceive, should be so rendered here. The Baptism of Christ therefore, affords no evidence of immersion.

Much reliance has been placed also on the passage, (John iii. 23.) "And John was baptizing in Enon, near to Salim, because there was *much water there*." The original is, $\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\alpha \dot{\iota}\delta\alpha\tau\alpha$, *many waters*, or *many springs* or *streams of water*. And this would be necessary for the accommodation of the multitudes that flocked to John's Baptism. Suppose some person, 100 years hence, should read the history of a Methodist camp-meeting, who did not know what mode of Baptism they practised; and should find it stated that they had selected such a place because there was much water there—because there were many springs or streams of water convenient; and should also read that

they had received and baptized a large number of converts: if he should hence conclude that they were Baptists, and practised immersion, would he not form a wrong conclusion?

6. I will next notice what, it seems to me, might be called a Scripture definition of the mode of Baptism. In Acts i. 5. we read, "For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." How this Baptism was effected we learn, Acts iii. 16—18. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, (saith God,) I will *pour out* my Spirit on all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants, and on my handmaidens will I *pour out*, in those days, of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Here Baptism was evidently by *pouring*.

The next case we notice is that of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. How could this vast multitude be immersed by the apostles, in a few hours, as we must suppose, in the afternoon of the day? It was the third hour, or nine o'clock, when Peter began his speech: and we cannot suppose that he and the other apostles finished their speaking, giving instruction, hearing the confessions of the people, &c., before noon. Suppose all the apostles to be engaged in baptizing for five hours; it would require that each one should baptize fifty each hour, that is, nearly one every minute. This would be a laborious business and I believe no man could perform it in the ordinary way of immersion. But where did they procure the water necessary, and the suitable places, for baptizing so many? At that season, water was very scarce at Jerusalem. The brook Kedron, which is the only stream of any consequence near, it is said, is dry at that season—Pentecost being near the last of March. Where did they all find the necessary changes of raiment? Many of them were strangers from all the adjacent country, who had come up to attend the feast. I must think that Baptism on the day of Pentecost, was performed in a very expeditious and summary way, and cannot suppose that it was by immersion.

The next case we notice is that of Philip and the Eunuch, Acts viii. 38, 39. "And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water," &c. What water they found on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is called desert, we know not; but probably

only some small streamlet or spring; as travellers give us no account of any considerable stream in that direction. But if they met with a fountain sufficient for immersion, I wonder that there is nothing said about the change of raiment that is necessary.—But it is said that they both went down, εἰς τὸ ἵδωρ, *into the water*; and came up, ἐκ *out of the water*. This they might do, without his being immersed, as I have said before. But if this form of expression proves that one was immersed, it proves that both were; for it says that they *both went down into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch*. If then it proves any thing, it proves too much: for none, I suppose, would admit that both were immersed. But it is not necessary to suppose that they went into the water at all. The preposition εἰς, here used, is as indefinite, and has as many meanings, as the preposition ἐν, in the former case. It is very often rendered, *to, unto, at, &c.* and the preposition ἐκ, very commonly means *from*. We may therefore, with equal propriety say, they went down both *to* the water, and came up *from* it. There is therefore no proof of immersion here.

The next case we consider, is the Baptism of Paul. (Acts ix. 18.) I think it would be difficult for any one to read the original, in view of the circumstances of the case, and believe that Paul was immersed. He had been blind for three days, and had neither eaten nor drunk, from his great distress of mind. He must therefore have become very feeble. But when Ananias had come and laid hands upon him, and prayed, it is said, “Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received his sight forthwith, and arose, (ἀναστὰς, *rising, or having arisen,*) was baptized.” Here is nothing like going to a fountain, having change of raiment, or the like; but it seems plainly intimated that he received the ordinance on the spot, either standing on his feet, or sitting up in his bed, if he had been lying, which is probable. Afterwards he received meat and was strengthened. If immersion had been the mode, is it not likely he would have received meat first, while preparation was being made?

We next notice the Baptism of Cornelius and his family. (Acts x. 47.) And here the expression, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized; which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we,” plainly intimates that water was to be brought in a vessel; and could not with any propriety be used, if the person was to be taken to some fountain or pool to be dipped.

The next is the jailer and his household, (Acts xvi. 33.) And here it seems next to impossible to conceive how they could have been immersed in the dead hour of the night, and within the enclosure of the prison: for we cannot suppose they went out to a stream or fountain. The jailer's house was no doubt a part of the prison building; and he brought them out of the dungeon in which they had been confined, into his own house; and having washed their stripes, was straightway, (*παραχρημα* *immediately*,) baptized, he, and all his.

The two passages, Rom. vi. 4, and Col. ii. 12, are often referred to as proving immersion. One says, "we are buried with him by Baptism into death;"—the other, "buried with him in Baptism." The language here is evidently figurative; and it is believed by some of the best commentators that there is no reference whatever to the mode of Baptism. But if the burial by Baptism be understood to mean a literal immersion in water; why not take the death as literal also? Buried, *i. e.* immersed, by Baptism, into or *unto death*—and then it would be an immersion like that of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. But it would be difficult to find any similarity between Baptism in any form, and the burial of Christ; whose body was laid in a tomb, in a niche in the side of the wall, and not covered, or buried, in the common sense of that term, at all.

7. I have now gone over the principal cases that touch upon the mode, both in the Baptism of John, and the practice of the apostles: and we have found no place in which immersion is certainly proved; but we have found several, in which it seems improbable, not to say, impossible, that it should have been practised. Can it be then, that so great stress is laid upon the *mode*, in the New Testament, that nothing is Baptism but an entire immersion of the body in water?—that so large a portion of the Christian world has honestly adopted an error upon this subject, that actually unchurches them, and throws them out of God's visible kingdom on earth? I cannot think so.

I have heard the following plan proposed; and I would recommend any one to try it. Let him make four columns on a piece of paper; at the head of the first, put *certainly by immersion*; at the head of the second, *probably by immersion*; of the third, *probably not by immersion*; of the fourth, *certainly not by immersion*. Then let him take his Concordance, and, beginning at the first of Matthew, look for every place in which the word baptize, Baptism, &c. occur in the New Testament; and after

carefully examining the passage, let him set it down under the head to which he may think it belongs. When he has gone through in this way, he will then see how the majority of cases stand, and how the weight of Scripture evidence preponderates. This trial will of course be the fairer, and more correct, if he be acquainted with the original, and use the Greek Concordance, and the Greek Testament instead of the English. For there are a number of places, as we have already seen, in which the original word baptize, is rendered *wash*. These passages, of course, the mere English reader must overlook. The Greek scholar will also know better the force of the original language, and the indefinite character of those Greek prepositions rendered *into*, and *out of*, upon which so great stress is laid in deciding this question. Let any one, I say, pursue this course candidly and fairly; and I believe the result will be, that, under the fourth head, *certainly not by immersion*, he will put down several cases: under the third, *probably not by immersion*, a goodly number: under the second head, *probably by immersion*, he may perhaps put down a few: but under the first head, *certainly by immersion*, he will not be able to put down a single case. He would find however that the word is often used without any allusion to the mode whatever.

I have heard of this case being proposed to a Baptist minister: suppose there had been a law in Judea, making it a capital crime, for one man to immerse another in water: and suppose that John the Baptist had been taken up and brought to trial, under this law, for immersing our Saviour; and that you had been one of the jury in the case. And let it be allowed that all the evidence to be adduced to prove the fact, was the simple statement as we have it in the New Testament by the different evangelists, corroborated by other cases of Baptism mentioned. Now, what would have been your verdict in such a case, on a trial for life and death? The Baptist preacher took a day for consideration: and his answer finally was,—“If I were a Presbyterian as you are, I suppose I should acquit him; but being a Baptist, I should condemn him.” I believe it would be hard for an impartial judge to make out a verdict of guilty, in such a case. The evidence would not be sustained as sufficient in a court of law.