



BRIEF STATEMENT

OF THE

SENTIMENTS OF THE BAPTISTS

ON THE

ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM.

BY

JOSEPH KINGHORN.

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*“GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS,
BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND
OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST.”—MATH,
XXVIII. 19.*

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A BRIEF STATEMENT, &c.

THE people usually called Baptists differ from other Christians, on the subject of baptism, both in their opinion and practice. The following observations contain a brief statement of their leading sentiments respecting it.

They premise that the source of all authority, in this, as in everything that concerns the divine will, is the word of God: and as they refuse to appeal to any other quarter for their decision, so they are convinced that their opinions and their practice are of no importance, further than as they are supported by the authority of the Bible. They conceive that, according to the New Testament, the law of baptism is the commission which the Lord Jesus Christ gave to his Apostles; and that the best explanation of it is derived from their conduct, in the first planting of Christianity.

In all the instances distinctly recorded, faith was professed first, and baptism followed as the evidence of it. To this point they wish particularly to direct the attention of inquirers. The fact is CERTAIN and UNDENIABLE, that, in the first ages of Christianity, multitudes did manifest their faith in Christ, and their desire to die unto sin, and to rise unto newness of life, by their baptism. They believe that there is not a single case to be found, which, when properly considered, forms an exception to this statement; nor an inference to be drawn, which can prove the baptism of infants to have been the command of the Lord, or the practice of his Apostles.

They know that it is said, children were brought to our Lord, and that he kindly encouraged the parents, and was displeased with his disciples for rebuking them, saying, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom

of heaven. But it does not appear that the parents asked more than that he should put his hands on them, and pray, and bless them, or that our Saviour did more than was requested of him. Besides, we are distinctly told that our Lord baptized not, but his disciples, John iv. 2; we are therefore warranted to conclude that no baptism took place in the present case.

Of the households which are mentioned as being baptized, and which are often represented as the strong support of infant baptism, there is not one instance, in which it can either be proved, or rendered probable, that an infant was in the family. All the household of the jailer heard the word of the Lord, believed, and rejoiced. Acts xvi. 32—34. The household of Stephanas, the first fruits of Achaia, addicted themselves to the ministry of the Saints—1 Cor. xvi. 15.—On the family of Cornelius the Holy Ghost descended; and Peter and his friends heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God; and this led the Apostle to consider them as fit subjects of baptism, since (said he) they have received the Holy Ghost as well as we. Acts x. 44—47. Now as all these circumstances are so different from what the state of infancy admits, the Baptists conclude, —either, that there were no infants in those households, or that the sacred writers did not advert to them, when describing the effect of the gospel: and of course, they conceive that these instances afford no evidence of infant baptism.

And as to the instance of Lydia, it does not appear either that she was or was not married. She was from home, on business, at Philippi, when she heard Paul, and believed, and with her household was baptized. But the term household proves nothing respecting age; and the other circumstances mentioned exhibit no evidence that she had any infants in her family.

The declaration of the apostle Peter to the Jews, Acts ii. 39— for the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are far off, is often urged against the Baptists; but, they think, without any force; for, besides other reasons which might be stated, they conceive that the limitation in the next clause settles the point, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The history of the New Testament agrees with the sentiment that only believers, and not infants, were baptized, from the manner in which the accounts are- stated. This has received a strong illustration from the events of late years. Missionaries, who have gone to preach the gospel to the Heathen, and who have baptized not only adults, but infants also, state in their reports, the number of adults, and also the number of children, which they have baptized. A circumstance which never occurs in the accounts of the Baptist missionaries, from the nature of their sentiments; and which also never occurs in the New Testament. In the Reports of the Baptists, the number of those who have openly professed their faith in Christ, and of those who have been baptized, are the same. Here again is a striking resemblance between their statements and those of the New Testament, which cannot easily be accounted for, but on the ground that the sentiments and practice of these missionaries and those of the first missionaries of the Christian church were similar.

The Baptists also conceive that the references made to baptism, in the New Testament, shew that believer only were baptized; because the expressions used could not, in the same direct manner, apply to those baptized in infancy. For instance, Rom.vi.3, 4, Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are

buried with him by baptism unto death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. —Gal. iii. 27. For, as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. And the Apostle Peter, speaking of the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water, says, The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth now save us {not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God) by the resurrection of Christ. I. Pet, iii. 21, And here the Baptists remark the minute agreement of this allusion to the preservation of Noah and his family in the ark, with their views of baptism, as there was not an infant in the ark; —all who were there kept alive were adults; so that even the figurative application of that event to baptism cannot include infants. Nor can they find any passage in the New Testament, referring to baptism, which can fairly prove that infants were a part of the baptized.

It is objected, that there is no instance mentioned in the New Testament, of the descendants of a Christian being baptized on his arriving at adult years; and therefore, it is said, we have no precedent for our practice. To this the Baptists think it sufficient to reply, that, if the objection proves anything, It proves too much; for there is no instance of any such persons being members of the church at all; and, if there is no instance recorded of their baptism, there is equally none of their conversion.

They have been urged with the proselyte baptism of the Jews, as a foundation for infant baptism. To this they reply, it is by no means proved that this practice existed in the time of our Lord: — it was not authorized by the law of God; and when adopted by the

Jews, it was never administered to the descendants of those who were by that rite admitted into the Jewish profession. The immediate families of the proselytes were baptized, but not their posterity; so that, instead of being the foundation of infant baptism from generation to generation, this Jewish baptism would annul the rite altogether, except in the case of the first introduction of a family into the profession of the Gospel. Besides this, they further reply, that the history of baptism begins in the New Testament with the baptism of John, which is clearly stated to be of divine authority, and for this reason our Lord submitted to it, to shew us that divine institutions ought to be obeyed. He also appointed baptism to be administered during the time of the ministry of John; and after he rose from the dead, he rendered the institution permanent, by the commission he gave to his Apostles and the description of its subjects. So that the whole progress of the institution is unconnected with an uncommanded Jewish rite.

They observe, also, that the baptism of John does not appear to have been administered to infants; none are on record as being baptized: the circumstances mentioned do not suppose that they were admitted: and the name given to John's baptism, — the baptism of repentance, expressly excluded them.

They believe that the baptism of the Christian church has nothing to do with the circumcision of the Jewish church, because the nature and end of the two institutions are not the same; —and the subjects are differently defined. They think it must be granted, that if the argument from circumcision to baptism be valid, the law of the former will apply to the latter, so far as the circumstances of the case admit; and if so, it will necessarily represent the church of Christ as a national, hereditary body, and

bring forward, in various ways, a train of consequences which very few Christians could allow. Besides, it would inevitably follow, from the law of circumcision, that no head of a Christian household ought to permit an unbaptized person to be a permanent member of his family, and that, whenever his power enabled him, he ought to oblige submission, because the command to Abraham was both peremptory and authoritative. Gen. xvii. 9—14. And not only is this unlike the general principles of the Christian dispensation, but we have evidence that it was not the plan adopted in the Apostolic church. It will not be imagined that the believing husband, in the case mentioned, I. Cor. vii.12, obliged his unbelieving wife to be baptized, and yet he was directed not to put her away. Applying the law of circumcision to baptism, one of these things must have taken place. Thus, it appears that the Gentile converts did not follow, as their rule, the law given to Abraham.

And they further think it manifest that baptism could not be viewed by the Jewish converts as coming in the room of circumcision, because they continued to observe the Jewish commandment. This is clear, not only from their zeal for the law in general, but from their attempt to impose circumcision on the Gentiles, as necessary to salvation: they therefore could not consider their own national rites as displaced by the Christian ordinance. And it is as evident, as to those who differ from the Baptists it must appear remarkable, that, in the debate concerning this subject, no allusion is ever made to the sentiment, that baptism was appointed in the room of circumcision.

They also think that, if such a substitution had actually taken place, something would have occurred in the numerous passages

relative to baptism, which would have shewn, bow far the law given to Abraham applied to the dispensation of the gospel, and was adopted as the law of Christ. —Certainly, the attempt to establish it by Col. ii. 11, 12, will not carry conviction. In whom also we are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein you also are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. Whatever the Apostle refers to, it is not to any institution in which human instrumentality is engaged: for the Christian's circumcision is that which is made without hands by the circumcision of Christ. How can this expression mean, by our being baptized, when the circumcision was just before said to be made without hands?

They believe that the principles on which the Apostles reason, when they treat of this subject, far from countenancing the baptism of infants, tend a different way, and favor their own sentiments. They observe that Abraham is called the father of them that believe, though they be not circumcised, Rom. iv. 11— but they cannot find that the blessings and privileges of the spiritual seed of Abraham ever extended beyond those who were at the time professed believers. The representations in the New Testament strike their minds very forcibly. We are the **CIRCUMCISION**, which worship God in spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Col. iii. 3. **KNOW YE**, therefore, that they which are **OF FAITH**, the same are the children of Abraham. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. And if ye be Christ's, **THEN** are

ye ABRAHAM'S SEED, and HEIRS according to the promise. Gal. iii. 7,26, 27. 29. To such children of Abraham none would hesitate to administer any of the ordinances of the Christian church. But, till the evidences of faith begin to be manifest, we have no reason to consider them as of that family.

They think that positive ordinances, from their very nature, require positive appointment; or a proof from example, that they had been appointed: and though they conceive that, where there is so much testimony, there is little room for inference, yet they see no reason to fear any fair deduction that the New Testament will warrant. They know that the observance of the first day of the week is objected to them as a result from inference. On this point they feel no hesitation in replying, that if there were as much evidence, that infants were baptized, as there is, that the first day of the week was observed by the Apostles, as the day of Christian worship, they should think their present practice an improper limitation of the New Testament examples.

They conceive that nothing can be more plain or obvious than that what Jesus Christ did NOT institute cannot be an ordinance of his. And not finding anywhere, that he has appointed the baptism of infants, they cannot view that rite as marked with his authority. The baptism of those who believe is recorded in the New Testament, and is clearly defined in the commission of Christ to his disciples. The baptism of infants, who are incapable of faith in Christ, has never yet been found there. It, therefore, appears to them evident, that by baptizing those who profess their faith in him, they are following a plain scriptural guide; but, by baptizing infants, they would be exposed to an unanswerable

objection, for doing that, as a command of Jesus Christ, concerning which they find nothing commanded by him.

With respect to the MODE of baptism, the Baptists believe that IMMERSION was the manner in which it was administered by our Lord and his Apostles. They conceive themselves here possessed of strong proof in their favor even from the concessions of many learned men who were not of their body, but who have granted that the sense of the Greek verb, to baptize, is to dip, or to immerse; and that immersion was the primitive manner.

In their estimation, the accounts of the baptism of Jesus Christ, and of the Eunuch, shew that the mode used was NOT sprinkling; and the places chosen for baptism, viz. the river Jordan, and Enon near Salim, “because there was much water there,” shew that there was need of a large quantity. The sense of the word, baptize, sufficiently marks the original practice; since it would be needless to explain any action which was defined by the very word that was used. For, as the verb to baptize signifies to immerse or to dip; it would be unnecessary to say, how John baptized our Lord; since that would be the same as if it was said, he dipped him, by dipping him.

As to those instances, where the place is not mentioned, the habits of both Jews and Gentiles in eastern climates, where they so frequently used ablutions, which were performed by immersion, is a sufficient answer to the supposed difficulty, that they had not places convenient for such an administration of baptism.

The debate concerning the mode of baptism seems to arise from a Greek word being used instead of an English one, and not from any ambiguity in the meaning of the word itself. While the

Greek was a living tongue, and its force fully understood, there does not appear to have been any debate respecting the sense of the word, or the mode of baptism. The description given of baptism by the early writers, and the whole manner in which they speak of it, shew how it was then understood.

The Baptists also maintain that the manner in which some very learned men have defined the word, even when writing against them, is sufficient for their cause. They can scarcely ask for more than the acknowledgment of DR. OWEN. “For the original and natural signification of it, it signifies, to dip, to plunge, to dye, to wash, to cleanse.” (Sermons and Tracts, p. 581.) And they conceive that the endeavor to evade the force of such a definition, by attempting to distinguish between dipping and washing, can be of no service, as it is obvious that nothing is washed which has only a few drops of water applied to any particular part.

The Baptists also observe that, if the word had been sometimes used in a figurative and improper sense, to an extent which does not appear to have been the case, it would not have been surprising; since there are few words which are not occasionally applied in a manner remote from their original meaning. But this would not have altered its signification when used as a description of the rite of baptism. It would be possible to find instances, in which our English verb, to dip, is not used in its strict sense; yet, had the term baptize been translated by this word, no one acquainted with our language would have supposed that the subjects of baptism mentioned in the New Testament were sprinkled.

They observe, also, that all the references to this institution are certainly not to the sprinkling of a few drops. Thus, the sufferings of our Lord are compared to a baptism;—the salvation of Noah and his family from the flood is compared to baptism;—the Apostles were baptized with the Holy Ghost, which, coming down from above, is properly described as poured out, and shed abroad; but, in its effect on them, is pointed out as descending with “a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind; and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” Acts ii. 2. It is also called being buried with Christ in baptism, in one place, Col. ii. 11—by baptism, in another, Rom. vi. 4. In all these instances the reference is certainly not to a trivial application of water, as in sprinkling, but to that which overflows and overwhelms; and which presents no image to the mind, but what perfectly agrees with the primitive idea of immersion, and is evidently derived from it.

So far as the sense of words is to be ascertained by subsequent facts, they conceive that they have additional important evidence on their side, as immersion was for a long time universal;—the introduction of sprinkling was gradual;—in opposition to the acknowledged practice of the ancient church, and considered as defensible only on the plea of necessity;— its extensive spread is confessed to be only of comparatively late date; and it was never universally practiced. For these reasons they cannot consider sprinkling as baptism.

As to the ENDS and USES of the institution, the Baptists, in common with Christians in general, conceive that baptism ought to precede church communion; since it is clear, that not only the members of the primitive church were baptized before they were

admitted, but also there is neither an exception to this practice, nor any direction to admit those who were unbaptized. And, respecting those views in which they feel obliged to differ from so many whom they esteem, they wish explicitly to state, —that they do not conceive baptism to be essential to salvation, any more than they consider the Lord's supper as essential to that end. They do not consider that men are made Christians by it, or cannot be Christians without it, for this manifest reason, that they think it ought not to be administered to any, but such as are Christians or sincere believers in Christ first. They do not consider it as regeneration, which they believe is a renewal of the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, and which they believe ought to precede the administration of baptism. They do not consider it as a meritorious action, by which they are to be saved; —but they view it as a manifest profession of faith in Christ Jesus; —as a formal renunciation of all dependance on themselves, or on their own merits, for acceptance before God; —and as a direct declaration that they are relying on the atonement made by him who died and rose again, for their justification before God. They consider it, also, as one part of their Christian obedience: as a submission to the authority of Christ, and as an evidence of their love to him. They consider it as shewing forth their desire to die unto sin, and to walk in newness of life; and they view the New Testament as calling upon them, thus visibly, to begin their Christian profession; to attach themselves to the cause of their Saviour, and to enlist under his banner.

They also forcibly feel the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was baptized by John in Jordan; and, though for his own personal benefit, he needed not the administration of any

ordinance:—though the dispensation of John was only temporary, and very inferior to that which soon was to follow, yet, to shew us the importance of openly obeying whatever is of divine appointment, our blessed Lord presented himself to John for baptism; and when John refused him, he returned the memorable answer, thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.

They are aware that their acting on these sentiments, in baptizing those who have received baptism in the usual way in infancy, subjects them to blame. But they think their conduct fully justifiable, until their reasons for their practice are fairly refuted. Because, if they are right, the sprinkling of infants is, neither in mode nor subject, obedience to the command of Christ; and the attempt to restore an institution of Christ to its primitive state demands, at least, a candid investigation: whilst they freely acknowledge that, if they are wrong, they are responsible to a serious extent, for encouraging a needless division in the church of Christ.

This brief statement, respecting the ordinance of baptism, offers a short view of the reasons why the Baptists differ from many whose talents they acknowledge, and whose piety they highly venerate.—But, though they cannot admit the baptism of infants, they feel the importance of instilling instruction into the minds of the young; of impressing serious sentiments as soon as they are capable of understanding them, and of engaging their attention to religious habits in their early days; and, while they daily look up to God to bestow on them his grace, they acknowledge the obligation they are under, to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Here they would, ask their fellow-Christians, who differ from them, ONE PLAIN QUESTION—Are the sentiments and practice of the Baptists, or are they not, agreeable to what you read in the New Testament on the subject?

It may be said that no notice has been taken of the history of infant baptism.

The Baptists are not unacquainted with the early introduction of infant baptism; but, after every inquiry which they have made, they are satisfied that its divine authority cannot be established from history. Though they acknowledge that it appeared early, they do not find that it is ever clearly traced up to the times of the Apostles, by a century at least; and then it appeared in company with other rites of equal antiquity, particularly with trine immersion, and the use of honey and oil in baptism, and with the sign of the cross, on that and other occasions. These cannot be opposed, as unscriptural, if infant baptism is to be received on the authority of history, —In examining the ancient writers, they think it distinctly visible that the baptism of infants was not introduced till the doctrine of the church had, in many things, lost its primitive simplicity.

In early times baptism was called regeneration, from being originally administered to those who gave the church reason to hope that they were renewed by the Holy Spirit, who came and professed their faith in Christ, and were baptized on that profession. Till this was done, they were ordinarily not considered in a state of safety; but when they had fulfilled the injunction of the Lord, they were thought to be much more secure; they were enrolled in the number of believers; they partook of all the advantages of membership in the Christian church; and it was

believed that their sins were forgiven, and that they enjoyed a special effusion of spiritual blessings. It is easy to attribute to the sign the thing signified', and as soon as men supposed that the administration of the ordinance would be attended with such advantages, it is not surprising that they should wish to extend them to their infant posterity.

Yet, it does not appear that in the early ages, the baptism of infants was either usual, or frequent. The first notice we have of it (in Tertullian's works) supposes the contrary. Had it been the constant practice from the days of the Apostles, no hesitation could have been raised concerning it in the year two hundred. At that time, it appears to have been administered only in cases of supposed danger; it was called the remission of sins; and if the child was removed by death, it was supposed to secure his salvation.

One thing, however, is remarkable—whenever baptism was administered in the times of antiquity, whether to the adult or to the infant subject, one of the distinguishing features of New Testament baptism was constantly exhibited—it was always on a profession of faith, either made BY the subject, or made FOR him, and in his name: so that he was considered as a believer, and baptized under that description. Nor was it placed, in early antiquity, on the ground of a supposed connection with the covenant of circumcision: — this mode of defending the practice, though now thought to be its chief support, was not then discovered; and when discovered, was brought forward rather as furnishing a general analogy, than an argument of essential consequence.

In striking consistency with the views now exhibited, nearly as early as the first appearance of infant baptism, we find from accidental evidence, that the practice of INFANT COMMUNION had obtained an undisputed currency. The argument is short, but it appears clear and forcible; the subjects of one ordinance have a right to partake of the other.

This brief statement of facts furnishes a reply to a common objection—if the principles of the Baptists are correct, How came the institution to be so altered, that in the end it was subverted? But besides, the Baptists add, that the alteration which took place respecting this institution, is neither so surprising nor unaccountable, as the fact, that the Jewish church, whose ritual law was so particular and express, should have neglected for many centuries the primitive and appointed manner of attending to one of their most distinguished ceremonies, and probably for a considerable time had totally omitted another.* And their restoration is a sufficient proof, that a simple regard to the word of God will recover a forgotten truth, or restore a lost ordinance with as much clearness and authority, as if it had been afresh appointed by the dictate of inspiration.

They conceive farther, that this circumstance suggests a sufficient answer to the common objection, How happens it, if they are in the right, that so many eminently great and pious men have been in the wrong? Since it is proved, that for many centuries the whole Jewish church, containing saints and prophets of the most distinguished order, actually lived in neglect of part of the divine appointment of their law. Besides, the same difficulty might be urged against the Paedo-Baptists, who dissent from the establishment; —the members of the establishment itself; and the

whole Protestant community of every country and denomination. For it might be asked, how came so many great and excellent men, who have been the ornament of each community, to differ from those of other denominations? And how came they all to feel the necessity of departing from the church of Rome? since that church, during a long period, and we believe through the worst times, contained in its bosom a number of the excellent of the earth, and could plead the argument from the authority of names with more force, than those who departed from her at the beginning of the reformation could possibly pretend to.

* At the feast of Tabernacles, the children of Israel were expressly commanded to dwell in booths; see Lev. xxiii. 39—43. Yet this seems to have been neglected from the days of Joshua to those of Nehemiah; see Neh. viii. 14—17. The Passover was also often neglected, as appears from II. Chron. ch. xxx. and ch. xxxv., particularly ver. 17, 18. This is not the place for the discussion of such a subject; but the following remarks, and practical observations, of the REV. THOS. SCOTT, on Neh. viii. 17, well deserve the reader's attention.

“Ver. 17, Done so, &c. It is evident that this and the other solemn feasts were totally neglected at some times, and for a long while together; yet a few instances occur of the feast of Tabernacles being kept; and these words must, therefore, be understood of the exactness, unanimity, and joyfulness, with which it was at this time celebrated.

“Pract. Obs. Alas! how little have the commandments and institutions of our God been hitherto observed, even among his professed worshippers! So that when individuals, or collective bodies, come near the standard of his word, in the power of

godliness, they become men 'wondered at.' But though none, from age to age, or through whole nations of professing Christians, have ever served God, as some small company may aim to do; yet if these be evidently obeying the plain meaning of Scripture, they ought not to be condemned as singular, precise, or affected; but to be commended and imitated."

[N.B.— This Tract is the Appendix to "An Address to a Friend on Church Communion.""]

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