

# THE CHRISTIAN.

FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD.—Paul.

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## The Christian.

### IS THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST UNDERSTOOD?

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And his disciples asked him, saying, why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered, and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you Elias is come already, and they knew him not; but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the son of Man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist (Matt. xvii. 10-13).

If the question at the head of this paper were proposed to almost any of our scribes, they would most probably answer with an unqualified affirmative. Yet it is beyond doubt that many of our best thinkers have cherished very inadequate notion of that ministry.

It becomes a grave matter of inquiry, how John the Baptist restored "all things"? And what were the "all things," he restored?

The law had suffered many violation—and we have reason to believe that many of its commandments were lost in the rubbish of human tradition. This is plainly taught in Mark vii. 8-13. But where these violations of law rectified by John? or did he restore any of these lost commandments? But until we are able to solve these questions raised by the declaration of Christ, we have no right to think, or say, we understand the ministry of John! From these few words of Christ, in the 11th verse, we are enabled to see the relations of John's ministry to the law of Moses, as nowhere else in the holy Scriptures.

The word here rendered *restore*, is capable of being translated *accomplished*. The law had to be accomplished before it could be done away. John's mission had much to do with this accomplishment.

There were some things in the law which, if lost, all were lost. And again, if some things were really accomplished and realized, the whole law was established, and nothing lost.

If remissions of sins, or purification, were lost from the law, all its promises conditioned on their national purity, fall to the ground; and all its requirements become tedious and unprofitable ceremonies.

Hence the only way John could restore all things to the law was to restore its ordinance of remissive purification. Now let us see if we can discover this law in the books of Moses. For John could restore nothing to Christianity for two good reasons: John was never in the kingdom of Christ while on earth; and second, there were then nothing lost to Christianity to be restored. So, of course, this restoration must belong to the exclusively, and not to the gospel.

By referring to Num. xix. (to which we hope the reader will turn and carefully read), we find that in purification from any kind of defilement, the ashes of the red heifer, mingled with water, were sprinkled upon the unclean. But the reader will please observe that although this compound was called the water of purification, it really made every one that touched it unclean.

Even the priest who prepared the ashes had to wash his face and bathe his flesh, and be unclean until evening. Indeed, it produced uncleanness to touch the ashes of the red heifer, and even the sprinkling of this water effected, to him who sprinkled it, a ceremonial pollution. "It shall be a perpetual statute unto them, that he that sprinketh the water of separation shall wash his clothes, and he that touched the water of separation shall be unclean until evening" (Num. xix. 21).

Hence we perceive that it is a grave mistake in our Affusionists friends to make the sprinkling of the heifer-ashes, mingled with water, an act of purification. It only prepared them for the subsequent washing of their clothes and bathing of their bodies.

But that the Israelites understood bathing to mean immersion, is plain from the history of Elisha and Naaman. The prophet told him to bathe (*loue*) in Jordan seven times. And he went and immersed himself seven times.

Under the law there was no such thing as purification without the concluding bath. This gave validity to the preceding ceremonies, without which, even the water of separation but intensified his pollution. For every one that touched it became unclean!

But after all the preparation and sprinkling of this expensive compound, the ceremony concluded with washing of the clothes, and the bathing of the body of the candidate for remissive purification. But even then, this bath did not immediately eventuate in a sense of purity. The candidate was still unclean, until the sun went down. But in the very beginning of the new day, which began at sun-down, he found himself legally purified.

Just so was it with the remissive baptism which John preached. His disciples were to get remission early in the gospel day by believing in Christ.

We are now prepared to inquire what it was that John's ministry *restored* or *accomplished*? He restored to the law the only kind of pardon of which it was capable—that is, a prospective remission which could only be realized in the then coming day of Christ. It may look inconsistent to talk of the law as being restored while as yet in it there is no perfect pardon. But we must remember that it was not the design of the law to make anything perfect, except the bringing in of a better hope.

Immersion was as much an ordinance of the law as baptism is of the gospel; and was far more frequently used, both at the Tabernacle and in the Temple, than by its most devout advocates in the Christian kingdom.

When John commenced his preaching in the wilderness, it created a great excitement, to be sure. But, so far as we know, no one thought of calling it an innovation. Many, no doubt objected strongly to the place where his baptism was performed. But we hear of no intimation against the rite itself! The reason of this most likely was that John was of priestly lineage, and consequently, had the right to administer the compulsory act of purification. His ministry seemed to say to the Jews, You have been sprinkled with ashes and water long enough; come now

and wash off your ceremonial preparation in this final act of legal purification! And when the new day of the kingdom begins, you will be clean. To this view accords the prophecy of his father, Zecharias: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by remission of their sins."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

### THE ABIDING WORD.

No army ever survived so many battles as the Bible; no citadel ever stood so many sieges; no rock was ever battered by so many hurricanes and so swept by storms. And yet it stands. It has seen the rise and downfall of Daniel's four empires. Assyria bequeaths a few mutilated figures to the riches of the British Museum. Media and Persia, like Babylon, which they conquered, have been weighed in the balance and long ago found wanting. Greece faintly survives in its historic name, "Tis living Greece no more;" and the iron dome of the Caesars is held in precarious occupation by a feeble hand. And yet the book that foretells all this survives. While nations, kings, philosophers, systems, institutions, have died away, the Bible now exercises man's deepest thoughts, is examined by the keenest intellects, stands revered before the highest tribunals, is more read, and sifted, and debated, more devoutly loved and more vehemently assailed, more defended and more denied, more industriously translated and freely given to the world, more honored and abused than any other book the world ever saw. It survives all changes, itself unchanged; it sees all things decay, itself incorruptible; it sees myriads of other books engulfed in the stream of time, yet it is borne along triumphantly on the wave; and it will be borne along, until the mystic angel shall plant his foot upon the sea, and swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no longer, "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away; but the Word of the Lord endureth forever."

"THOUSANDS of men breathe, move, and live, pass off the stage of life, and are heard of no more. Why? They did not a particle of good in the world, and none were blessed by them: none could point to them as the instruments of their redemption; not a line they wrote, not a word they spoke could be recalled, and so they perished—their light went out in darkness, and they were not remembered more than the insects of yesterday. Will you thus live and die? Live for something. Do good, and leave behind you a monument of virtue that the storm of time can never destroy. Write your name by kindness, love, and mercy on the hearts of the thousands you come in contact with year by year, and you will never be forgotten. No, your name, your deeds, will be as legible on the hearts of those you leave behind as the stars on the brow of evening. Good deeds will shine as bright on the earth as the stars of heaven." F. H. W. S.