

## Selected.

## OBEDIENCE—BAPTISM.

Practice is the end of all theory; action the end of all instruction. "What shall we do?" is the one only sincere and sensible question when a man hears the Gospel and believes it.

The answer given was double,— "Repent and be baptized." That was the answer at first, and it must be the answer to end.

We have considered the former part of it. Let us now examine the latter,— "be baptized."

We have seen that our Lord organized, here on earth, a kingdom. It was to be governed, this kingdom, by the everlasting laws of heaven. Its subjects were to stand on the same organic law on which the angels stand and serve in the courts of God. To them amnesty was to be given for past rebellion; free pardon, bought by the Saviour, was to be freely conferred for all past breaches of the law; and they were enrolled henceforth as subjects and servants of the only Master and King.

That is the way in which that organization—the Church—presents itself in the New Testament. It stands among the kingdoms of the earth, distinct and solitary; setting aside their differences; ignoring distinction of rank, place, or nationality; knowing "neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free;" neither emperor nor beggar; but ranking them all as one in "the one brotherhood—the great, endless, world-embracing new "kingdom of heaven."

Now, all who believed the Gospel were told to "repent," to change their entire aim and purpose and views for life, and enter this kingdom, and live on its laws henceforward.

The method of entrance instituted by the Lord himself was *Baptism*.

He adopted a simple and significant rite, with which the people had been long familiar, as the form of naturalization into this kingdom. In that rite the King and His rebel subject meet. They enter there into agreement. The rebel renounces his rebellion, forswears his allegiance to all the tyrants that have usurped authority over him, denies their service, rejects their names, and takes forever the oath of allegiance to his rightful Lord and King, and vows to serve Him faithfully his life long.

This on the man's part. On the King's part there was the pledge of forgiveness, the promise of acceptance, the assurance of protection from the hostile tyrants, the help of the abiding Spirit as his ghostly ally in all times of danger and fear. And the Lord left the administration of this covenant, and the authority to act in His name in reconciling men and God, to the officers of this kingdom for all time—"Go ye into all the world and make all nations disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

Simply and clearly, baptism was thus the acceptance of God's service, the naturalization into His eternal kingdom. It was the first act of obedience, and symbolized, expressed and concentrated all the rest. It was the first act to be done; and it meant a whole life of obedience following. The man, a rebel before, stood up before men and angels, before earth and heaven, and renounced the slavery of his rebellion, and took a solemn oath of loyalty to his forgiving King.

He was saved in the act. We cannot see how any other word will express the result. He was lost in his rebellion. He turns, accepts the amnesty, swears himself into the kingdom of mercy and grace, of righteousness and love, and is saved.

Understanding what salvation is,—deliverance, not only from the penalty, but from the guilt and stain and power of sin: and understanding what

God's kingdom is,—the ordered polity formed here on earth, under the eternal laws of heaven; and, also, understanding what baptism is,—the covenant by which man renounces his sin, and enters the kingdom whose law is holiness—understanding these things, we can also understand the high things which Scriptures speak of baptism and its effects.

For the whole is consistent. The New Testament proclamation of these things goes together as one clear whole. We need do violence to no statement. We need pass over no Scripture. We need "explain away" no distinct declaration.

It is only because men have made a theory of "salvation," which is not the Scriptural one, or a theory of "the Church" which is merely human, or a theory of "repentance" or "faith" which is not in the New Testament, that they are compelled for consistency's sake, to make a theory also of baptism which requires them to pass over silently, or to do violence openly, to the plain words of the Lord and his Apostles.

It is our comfort to belong to a Church which fears no Scripture; a Church which has no human theory or system to support; and which, therefore, takes her children by the hand, in sure confidence, at all her worship, and bids them listen to the voice of the Lord and his Apostles.

"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us," saith Peter.

If my theory of salvation be that it means only final deliverance from hell, I must explain away the text. For no man ever held that baptism assures a man of *perseverance to the end*.

But, salvation being deliverance from the power of sin, its guilt and stain, here, in this world, a man is most surely saved the moment he rises and sincerely denies sin, and faces it as his deadly foe in God's name, and turns and pledges his life to righteousness and truth in the vows of holy baptism.

So the Apostle calls it "the laver of regeneration," and the "washing of regeneration."

And here apostles, and the entire Church Catholic, only follow the Master.

For Nicodemus, coming to Him by night to ask of this kingdom which He, the Prince of Israel, was come to set up, is told by the Lord himself, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

We cannot pass over the word *water*. We cannot explain that word away. We cannot suppose the Lord was misleading the anxious inquirer. If our theories of "the kingdom of God," or of entrance into it, require us to deal unfairly with the words of the Son of God, it is surely time to revise our theories.

It is a new birth. The words fairly express the meaning of baptism. No other words will do. We cannot spare them in their utter emphasis. Baptism, if we have been clear, is regeneration, a literal new birth.

A man denies his whole past life. He flings away his whole past purposes. He rejects the masters he has served hitherto,—the world, the devil, and the flesh. He flies to his rightful Lord and King. He knocks for admittance into the new kingdom founded upon earth. He is naturalized into it. He becomes a subject and citizen there. He puts himself under new laws. He is accepted, so flying. God receives him coming from his enemies, bruised and wounded. He takes him into the kingdom of love and mercy and goodness. The man receives the appointed sign and seal of pardon and acceptance. He is literally *new born* into the realm of light and truth, into the kingdom of heaven. He is borne out of chaos, darkness, and the anarchy of Satan, into life and light and order, eternal and divine.

We wonder how men stagger at God's gracious words. But the wonder goes when we consider

how they miss the earnest, downright, practical meaning of Christ's religion.

They let it slip away in metaphor. They dissolve it into personal feeling. They do not grasp it in its utterly practical proclamation, as a rebinding of rebel subjects, pardoned and accepted by the merits of Christ's death and passion, to the service of their Lord. Distinct and pronounced enough, in the New Testament, as a life-long war with Satan and for Christ, in the doing of all good works, they have changed it from a service steadfast, loyal, and true, while a man lives, to some mere security against deserved punishment when a man dies. Selfish in all, they have consecrated selfishness by turning it into religion.

The Church is "the household of God," saith the Scriptures. The covenant by which a man is adopted into God's family and becomes His son (if a man knows once what that means to the uttermost) is surely a new birth. And God's household is no metaphor. His kingdom is no figure of speech. Membership in it is no shadowy dream. Baptism is no empty rite for admission into an obscure sect.

These things are all practical, sensible realities, preached here plainly in a busy practical world. Christianity is a life, and not merely a system of theological opinion.—H. M. Thomson.

## MORE UPON THE DAY WE CELEBRATE AND WHY?

E. M. THOMSON.

I quote McGarvey's "Lands of the Bible," page 533. "On our morning ride we had been accompanied for several miles by a feeble old Arab who was travelling through the country on horseback. Assad, after conversing with him for some time, represented him to us as a man of prodigious learning. In the course of conversation the question arose why the Mohammedans kept Sabbath on Friday. He said it was because Adam was created on Friday," etc.

This I esteem as a valid reason why it was right and proper for them and all God-fearing people from Adam to Moses. I believe that all the nations that preserved the knowledge of God, and accepted His covenants, and hoped for the fulfilment of His promises, kept that day, and are keeping it still.

Let it be remembered that the Arabians and Mohammedans constitute near one-quarter of the human race, and their origin antedates the time of Abraham. At least a portion of their race sprung from the ancient stock of Hebrews from which Abraham sprang. I admit that Ishmael and the sons of Keturah, the second wife of Abraham, joined and incorporated themselves into the same nation, hence they are called in Jeremiah "a mingled people." The testimony of a race of such antiquity and undeviating adherence to their laws and traditions, is not to be ignored or lightly set aside.

But it will be said that Mohammedanism arose in the seventh century after Christ. Yes; but Mohammed conceived it his mission to restore the religion of Adam and Islam, which embraced the Sabbath and circumcision, both of which they perpetuate to this time.

The Sabbath is first brought to notice in the third chapter of Genesis, and is associated with the completion of the creation, and the division of time into seven parts, of which it is an abiding memorial. After this but one incidental reference is made to it for 2,500 years. That reference is when Laban said to Jacob, Fulfil her week, and I will give thee Rachel also. This reference comes from one not of the family of Abraham, but of the ancient stock referred to above. This people then and now keep the first and Adamic Sabbath on Friday.

When the Jews came out of Egypt they were,