

Is Infant Baptism of Divine Origin?

A paper read before the District meeting of Guysboro East, Antigonish and Port Hawkesbury, by Rev. F. H. Beale, and published by request of the body.

Is infant baptism of Divine origin? This question demands an answer from all who desire the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom by the unity of believers. A large number of good, intelligent people claim that the rite is of God. Others, equally good and intelligent, deny its Divine origin; while a still more numerous class are in doubt. Three considerations are here presented, which, in the writer's judgment, conclusively prove that it is not of God.

I. Infant Baptism is Unscriptural.

Surely if God had instituted the rite, some instruction would have been given in the Bible respecting mode, time of administration, signification, etc., but none is to be found. Not only is there nothing positive in the Word of God concerning the practice, but there is nothing which even remotely hints at it. The Roman Catholic can get over this difficulty by claiming for tradition equal authority with the Bible, or that the church has power to make rules for herself, independently of the Bible. But how do its advocates, who accept the Word of God as the only rule of faith and practice, meet this consideration?

Some do not attempt an answer, but have their children christened because it is the custom. Others ignorantly, or unthinkingly, allow it at the urgent request of the minister, who is tempted, often against his own better judgment, to perform the ceremony, for sectarian purposes. While still others cite passages of Scripture in support of the practice which do not have the slightest allusion to it. Examine, unbiased, the texts usually quoted in support of infant baptism, and see how far-fetched, fanciful, not to say, disingenuous, the interpretation in every case is. The gracious words of the Master, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven," (Mark 10: 14-15) are quoted, but it is known that Jesus did not baptize the children; for it is distinctly stated that "he laid his hands on them," and besides he never, by his own hand, baptized anybody (John 4: 2). The case of the baptism of the jailor's household (Acts 16: 33-34) is cited, but unwarrantably so, for the context says "he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." When the children of a household are old enough to rejoice, believing, no one will refuse them baptism. Lydia's household (Acts 16: 15) is given as another case of infant baptism, when it is not even known that she was ever married. Peter, in Acts 2: 38-39, is made to teach the practice when he says, "the promise is unto you and to your children." This eminent servant of God has been credited with many unlikely things, but this surely is the most unlikely, for the simple reason that the Greek word here translated "children," means "descendants," without any reference to age. A penitent descendant cannot possibly be an infant. The passages quoted to show that infant baptism takes the place of circumcision, or that the children of believers are in the covenant, and so are fit subjects for baptism, are in like manner, irrelevant. If only one text could be found in the Bible clearly supporting the practice, its claims to Divine origin might be admitted. But there is none; positively none.

II. Infant Baptism is Unreasonable.

In order to claim Divine origin for a teaching it must be founded upon reason. It is the boast of the gospel that it appeals not only to the affections and will, but to the reason as well. The unreasonableness of infant baptism will appear the more it is studied.

The application of water to the forehead of a child, accompanied with other incidentals, in the giving of a name, is not, in itself, unreasonable. But when this ceremony is substituted for Christian baptism, its folly is apparent. Nothing but the blinding tendency of custom and prejudice could make sensible people agree to the substitution.

Again, many believe that this ceremony, which is substituted for Christian baptism, makes the subject a child of God. The Roman Catholics teach that "baptism is a sacrament which cleanses from original sin, makes us Christians and children of God, and heirs to the kingdom of God," (Catechism). The Episcopalian child is taught to believe that he is "by baptism regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's church," (Prayer Book). But what reasoning man believes these assumptions? Every community has its quota of boys who are untruthful, profane or impure. But a large proportion of these boys have been made children of God by baptism in their infancy, if we accept this teaching. But we do not accept it. It is not claimed that the unbaptized children are any better, but it is insisted upon that they are no worse. The assumption that these boys, yea, and men too, who serve the world, the flesh, and the devil, are children of God, is so unreasonable as to be positively silly. In a similar way we are expected to believe that a large proportion of the drunkards and inmates of our prisons are children of God, for have they not been baptized?

But many who practice infant baptism, recoiling from such absurd conclusions, object that they do not believe in baptismal regeneration. Thank God for that! Still the consideration of unreasonableness holds. Indeed

there would seem to be less reason for the substitution of the ceremony for the ordinance of Christ in the case of those who do not attribute saving efficacy to it, than in the case of those who do.

III. Infant Baptism is Productive of Evil Results.

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" is a safe test in matters of this kind. When weighed in this balance, infant baptism is found wanting. What are some of its evil tendencies?

First. It creates and fosters false hopes of salvation. It is guilty before God of more perversion of the Saviour's teaching respecting the new birth than all other agencies combined. The Literary Digest of August 7, 1897, reports that Rev. G. Lee contributed an article to a United States Magazine in which he said: "Annually 700,000 American children die, of whom less than one third, or almost 200,000, are baptized. Our concern is with the remaining half-million, who annually die unregenerated by the saving water of baptism. Religion teaches that the difference between going away baptized and going away unbaptized is just the difference between possessing and not possessing the beatific vision of God in heaven for all eternity." Proceeding he says: "The crime of leaving unregenerated children in the bonds of sin will be attributed to those who were unwilling to baptize them. . . In everything else she' (the church) vindicates for her ordained ministers the exercise of the ministry; but in this she insists that every human being may and ought to do the sacred work. She takes the trouble to define and teach that man or woman, heretic or pagan, everybody without exception is able and is to be induced to baptize the dying." If this kind of belief were confined to one denomination the tendency would not be so harmful, but experience teaches that saving efficacy, of one degree or another, is attributed to the ceremony, especially in the case of the ignorant of all denominations that practice it. This is shown by the fact that mothers will have the rite administered to infants a few hours old, if they are not likely to live, and by the fact that, if the child of a neighbor happen to die unbaptized, there is the mournful shake of the head and the significant, "It could have done no harm anyway." In view of the insinuating nature of this heresy it is no wonder that two prominent pastors, members of the N. S. Methodist Conference of 1898, found it necessary to warn the body against the possible evil tendencies of the practice, stating "that many parents who bring their children for baptism cherish the belief that the regeneration of the child and its fitness for heaven are dependent upon its baptism."

Secondly. Infant baptism tends to prevent the moral sense by fostering a policy of compromise with conscience in the matter of obedience to Christ. Ask one who has been sprinkled in infancy if he has obeyed the command, "Be baptized," and he will say, "Yes." Ask him how, or when, he obeyed that command and he will say, "My parents, I am told, performed the ceremony when I was an infant." Press him still farther and he will admit that his obedience was forced, that is, it was not obedience at all. Think of the evil effect upon the moral nature, when such a compromise is made with conscience respecting obedience to an ordinance of Christ!

Third. Infant Baptism tends to support the papal system. We have no unkind word to say concerning the men and women who compose the Roman Catholic denomination, many of whom are excellent citizens, but the system itself is contrary to the genius of the gospel and, therefore, to be condemned. Their claim of papal infallibility is inimical to the two principles so prominent in the Anglo-Saxon constitution, namely, liberty of conscience, and the right of private judgment. Their veneration of the Virgin Mary is indirectly, if not directly, idolatrous. Their belief that the body and blood of Christ are actually present in the elements of the Supper, is grotesquely absurd. In a recent publication one of the clearest thinkers of the century argues that pedobaptism made the papacy possible. He says: "The church, in order to be thoroughly secularized, must be operated upon by a secularizing force supplied from within itself, and working within itself. Such a secularizing force is furnished in infant baptism, and could not be furnished in anything else than infant baptism, or something of an equivalent nature." However this may have been in the rise of the papacy, there is no doubt that the substitution of infant sprinkling for Christian baptism by Protestant denominations in common with Roman Catholics, is doing much to strengthen the papacy and to create in these other denominations a likeness to the papacy. The drift Romeward, so much in evidence in some quarters today, has here its chief underlying cause. Some one has said, "Infant baptism crawled like a lizard from the papal swamp." These figures are not too strong. Would that all who accept the Word of God as the true standard might unite in driving it back to the place of its nativity.

Did space permit, the brood of evils springing from this prolific mother might be multiplied almost indefinitely. Dr. Alvah Hovey, late president of Newton Theological Seminary, charges infant baptism with "taking away from the Christian ordinance a large part of its meaning;" with "ascribing to the ordinance an imaginary virtue;" with "marring the constitution of the Christian churches;" with "facilitating the union of Church and State;" and with "dividing the followers of Christ." But sufficient has been said. Our object is accomplished. We have shown that infant baptism is unscriptural, unreasonable, and productive of evil results. The conclusion is inevitable that it is not of God, and, therefore, of man. Jesus said to some of the people of his time,

"In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," (Matt. 23: 9). Those who teach or practice infant baptism are chargeable with a similar offense. Some, while disbelieving in the teaching, will connect themselves with a church that practices it, thinking to place the responsibility on the minister who performs the ceremony. These should remember that the pastor, in the administration of an ordinance, is simply the hand of the church, and therefore no more responsible than are the other members. In view of the origin and nature of the practice, the proper attitude for all who desire the unity of believers to assume toward it is suggested by the immortal Watts:

"Should all the forms that men devise Assault my faith with treacherous art, I'd call them vanity and lies, And bid the gospel to my heart."

Canso, February, 20.

"As a Thief in the Night."

A TRUE STORY.

The following painful and sorrowful incident transpired in a Yorkshire home some few years since, and proves incontrovertibly the truth of an old saying, viz., "that men ought to repent before they die, and seeing they may die to-night they ought therefore to repent to-night."

"Come lass! Be sharp and get thee things off. Thy father'll be here in a twink, and dinner not ready, and ye noo how he goes on if he has to wait ever sich a munit."

"Yes, mother dear, I'll be sharp, don't you fidget, he's busy talking to that horrid feller, Sam Hoyle, he'll none be here just yet, but I'll be down in two minutes, and we'll have dinner ready in a crack."

And true to her word, Jennie was upstairs and down again in a minute or two, and soon the table was neatly laid, and the nicely cooked dinner dished up, when her father walked in.

He ought to have been a fine looking man, but sin had drawn its fingers over the once comely face, and bloated, pimply skin, with a ragged beard, and bleared eyes, showed plainly the kind of company he kept and the manner of man he was. For years his footsteps had been anything but a pleasant sound in that home, where he should have been welcomed by beaming faces and joyous voices—but alas! the terrible drink with its attendant evils, had quenched the light and happiness of that home, and now a sigh of relief was breathed, not when he entered the house but when he left it.

He was, withal, a man of considerable ability, fairly well educated, and had for some time held a good situation, and had been receiving a very good 'wage' as he would call it, but his wife and children seldom received much benefit from that source. Where it went they did not know, nor did they dare to ask. They were only too glad to have him away or quiet if he were at home.

This man was not a sceptic, at least, not professedly so. He did not object to his children attending Sunday School, and as long as everything was ready for him at home, he raised no objection to his wife and daughter going to the little chapel, which they loved so well, and in the years before, ere he had become sodden in sin, occasionally attended himself.

Many a time he had been warned of the consequences of the life he was leading, and had heard with his ears, though he understood not with his heart, the glorious message of salvation. But like many another he took no notice. Day in and day out he continued to go on in the same old sinful way, and if expostulated with, he would retort:—

"I'm no worse than others. And I don't care if I am, let the parsons mind their own business and I'll attend to mine. Anyway, religion is only for women, children and dying men, not for strong, healthy chaps like me."

This fair Sabbath morning he had been out for a walk with a man of his own order, and though they had been walking amid some of the fairest works of "our Father's" hands, no thought of the love that had made the world so pleasant and beautiful came into their minds; no word of praise or thanksgiving escaped their lips. Their talk was merely a recital of the incidents of last night's "spree" plentifully interlarded with oaths and curses.

And now father had come home, sober, it is true, but with an expression on his face that made Jennie thankful that she had "been sharp." The other children came in, and all took their seats, when suddenly—before the meat was even cut—one of the younger ones exclaimed:—

"Eh! Father! Art ill? See, mother, how white he is."

The man rose and left the table, saying "he felt a bit sick" bidding them all be quiet and get their dinners. But he spoke with such unwonted gentleness, that each wondered what was wrong.

They were not long left in doubt, in another minute he was back again in his seat, and the mother was just beginning to say "don't a feel better, lad?" when, uttering a groan, he leaned his head upon his hands, and fell forward on the table.

The younger children were frightened and began to cry, while the mother hastily arose and took one terrified