

THE CHRISTIAN.

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

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The Christian.

THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.

II. I mention a second peculiarity. The confession required before baptism and church membership; what is it? You remember that Jesus said: “Whosoever * * shall confess ME before men, him will I confess also before MY Father which is in heaven.” The Apostle Paul said in his epistle to the saints in Rome, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” And the beloved disciple said, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” The divine test of orthodoxy is, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? We ask every candidate for baptism: Do you believe with your whole heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and your Saviour? Do you earnestly desire to obey Him? This precise form is not essential; but the thought is. Every applicant for baptism must in some form confess with the mouth that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He is accepted as a personal Saviour. “We submit *no other tests* but faith and repentance, in admitting persons to baptism and church membership. We present to them no Articles of Faith other than the one article concerning the Divinity and Christhood of Jesus; we demand no narration of the religious experience other than is expressed in a voluntary confession of faith in Jesus; we demand no probation to determine their fitness to come into the church; but instantly on their voluntary confession of the Christ, and avowed desire to leave their sins and serve the Lord Christ, unless there are good reasons to doubt their sincerity, they are accepted and baptized, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are thus wedded to Christ, and not to a set of doctrines or to a party.”

“But,” you ask, “Suppose a man were to come and say, I prefer the Episcopal form of church organization and government, will you take me? I would say to him: What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is he? But suppose a man were to say, I think that in some way all men under God’s gracious providence will become holy and consequently happy. If not in this world; then, in the world to come.” I would say, What will you, here, and now, do with Jesus who is called the Christ? If a man were to request Baptism, and say, “I believe the doctrine of election and reprobation as taught in the Confession of Faith framed by the Westminster Assembly, I would reply, What will you do with God’s elect Son? What is the attitude of your mind and heart toward Him, and what is the purpose of your life? Let all dogmas,

and doctrines, and opinions, and speculations go; what will you do with God’s Son and the Saviour of a ruined race. Theology has its place; but it is out of place when it is presented to a sinner who desires to submit to the Lord Jesus in holy baptism. You see that the Disciples make the issue on Christ, and on Him *alone*. The confession previous to baptism, is a confession of faith in Jesus.

III. I mention a third peculiarity; I speak *now of baptism*. As to the form of baptism Disciples agree with immersionists, Jesus walked across the country forty miles to be baptized of John in the river Jordan. He had before his eyes every text in the Old Testament that mentions sprinkling; but he acted as I have indicated. There is something in baptism that requires persons to arise that they may attend to the divine requirement. Saul of Tarsus, weak and faint from intense mental excitement, and from days of fasting, is told to arise and be baptized. Why not baptize him in a reclining posture? Afterward in speaking of his baptism, he described it as a burial. When speaking of baptism to the saints in Colosse, he said: “Buried with Him (Christ) in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” We are told also that John baptized, “in Enon, near to Salem, because there was much water there.” These references, and others, seem to indicate immersion as the act which Jesus enjoined when he commanded penitent sinners to be baptized. “The meaning of the Greek term; its literal and metaphorical use in the New Testament; the incidental illusions to the primitive practice; the testimonies of the leading reformers, such as Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and the admissions of a host of lexicographers and critics—these have led us to the definite and fixed conclusion that immersion ‘is the ordinance of Christ.’ Moreover, as an effort to restore the primitive *catholicity* of the church is a prominent feature of our work, we could not be blind to the fact that immersion is catholic while sprinkling and pouring are not.” This movement you will please remember began with men who did not believe in immersion; but they said: Where God’s word leads we will follow.”

In taking our stand definitely and positively in favour of immersion we hold to that which bears the stamp of catholicity, and reject the practices which lack this stamp; and in a union of God’s people we must have something on which they all agree. Now all do agree that immersion, in water, of penitent believers, in obedience to the command of our Lord, and into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is Christian baptism. There is no dispute about this. There are doubts and discussions about sprinkling and pouring.

As to the persons who have a scriptural right to baptism Disciples say that this divine ordinance is only for those who believe in the

Lord Jesus and truly repent of sin. Here again we stand on undisputed territory. Infant baptism lacks the stamp of catholicity, while believer’s baptism has it. There is controversy about infant baptism; there is no controversy about the baptism of believers.

As to the purpose, the design, of Christian baptism I have to say, first, that we repudiate the idea of baptismal regeneration. We find no warrant in God’s word for thinking that baptism has power to work a moral or spiritual change. On the other hand, we do not teach that baptism is a mere form or ceremony by which persons are admitted into the visible church. Jesus says: “Come unto me.” In holy baptism the sinner makes his response. In this sacred ordinance he says: “Lord, I do come to thee. I formally, and solemnly, and truly, give myself to thee here and now.

‘Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid’st me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.’

“My head shall think, my heart shall feel, my lips shall speak, my hands shall work, my feet shall run—I give all, *all* to thee—I consecrate my entire being to thee—all of my powers in Christian baptism.” We, therefore, teach penitent believers coming to this institution that in baptism they *appropriate God’s promise of forgiveness*. We teach them to rely on the divine word: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” We call attention to the words of Simon Peter, just after he had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost: “repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The penitent “thus lays hold of the promise of Christ and appropriates it as his own.” “He does not *merit*” remission of sins; “nor *procure*” the forgiveness of God; “nor *earn*” deliverance from condemnation, by being baptized; “but he appropriates what the mercy of God has provided and offered in the gospel.” We, therefore, teach all who are baptized, that if they bring to their baptism a heart that renounces sin and implicitly trusts the power of Christ to save, they should rely on the Saviour’s own promise—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

IV. I mention a fourth peculiarity. This relates to the Lord’s Supper. The Disciples are not close communionists. That baptism precedes communion is the teaching of all Christians. The real question at this point is, What is baptism? We find no authority in Scripture to sit in judgment on this and that person and say, Thou shalt not. Nor on the other hand are we open communionists. I cannot make an argument to show that persons who have not submitted to Christ in baptism, as I understand Him to enjoin, shall come to the Lord’s table. This our open communion brethren do. It is clear that in the Apostolic Age,