

For these somewhat extended remarks, though an apparent digression, I need offer no apology, being persuaded that every candid mind must allow they have a very important bearing on the question at issue.

I admitted that those converts, at least, who were converted on and after the day of Pentecost were baptized on their conversion, and I may add, probably before they united with the church to celebrate the supper; but I think you will admit that it was not *because they were baptized* that these converts were received into the church, but simply and solely *because they were converts*, or believers; and if we could conceive it possible for a convert to have given evidence of his conversion, while refusing to be baptized, it may be assumed that such a convert would have been received unbaptized; for it is manifest nothing was required but evidence of genuine conversion; allowing that baptism was required, it was so only as an evidence of conversion, but that it is so now is not pretended.

You go on to observe, "if this is admitted (viz., that the converts were baptized, &c.) then we have a divine example, &c." I have admitted that we are bound to follow the example of the Apostolic churches as far as it is possible for us in our circumstances to do so; but I contend that we are placed in circumstances,—yes, brother, though I have already remarked pretty fully on this, it does appear to me of such importance as to justify a repetition;—I do unhesitatingly insist, the circumstances in which we are placed by the baptismal controversy renders it absolutely impossible for either you or us to follow the example of the New Testament churches in every respect. I have already particularized several respects in which you do not follow their example; and I could easily mention others; let it suffice to refer to one. When you baptize such a candidate as Mr. Noel you complacently conclude that now you have followed the example of the New Testament churches. But it needs only a little reflection to convince you that there is really no such example exhibited by these churches: you know their rule was to baptize on conversion; but here is a christian who had been converted perhaps half a century, and had been all that time faithfully and zealously serving his Lord, and enjoying at certain intervals during that period the privilege of celebrating the Lord's supper; though you assume in your articles of faith (certainly unwarrantably) "that ordinance is the peculiar privilege of those who immerse;—here I say is such a christian observing the *initiatory* rite of baptism; but where is the divine example that is followed? Assuredly it was as much the intention of the Institutor that it should be observed on conversion, as that it should be observed at all. Here then is "a change in the order and ordinances of the church of Christ. How you can justify yourselves in countenancing it while you contend that no possible change of circum-

stances can demand or justify the slightest deviation from apostolic example I cannot see. I solemnly assure you, dear brother, I feel constrained to view it as a deviation from Apostolic example equally great as to admit acknowledged christians to the Supper, though owing to their views of the ordinance, they did not see it their duty to be immersed.

You say that the dogma that a change of circumstances may demand and justify a change in the order and ordinances of the church of Christ is the glaring error that is at the root of all the heresies, and anti-christian practices that corrupted the christian church. I think, brother, you are aware that these heresies, &c., that corrupted the christian church were not introduced on the pretext that circumstances rendered them absolutely necessary; but on the ground that the church (alias, the clergy) was invested with authority to settle the meaning of scripture;—to decree rites and ceremonies; and in short, to enact such laws for the government of the church as a majority of the clergy should deem expedient. Nothing of the kind is contended for by the advocates of open communion. Nay, as already observed they appeal to the unequivocally expressed injunctions of the divine word: they contend that the change of circumstances occasioned by the baptismal controversy, not only *justifies* a change in some respects as it regards the ordinance of baptism, and admission to the church of Christ, but renders it *absolutely unavoidable*. It is vain to talk as if a change in these respects were optional; for that it is not. We may choose between one change and another, but between *a change* and *no change* we have no choice. We contend for one line of procedure in reference to baptism and admission to the church; you contend for another, but both in certain respects deviate from the example of the New Testament churches. As perfect imitation is impossible, we feel it our duty to aim to follow Apostolic example as to what appears of the greater importance; and acting on this principle we feel impelled to the conclusion that the manifestation of union and love among the followers of Christ is of incomparably greater importance than a punctilious uniformity in respect to the ordinance of an external ceremony: for, however important the ordinance of baptism may be; and we would be far from detracting the least iota from its importance; yet we believe that all the deficiency really chargeable on pious Pedobaptists in reference to it, amounts merely to a mistake respecting the time and manner of its observance. Many of them, doubtless, have as high a regard to the rite as an ordinance of Christ, according to their own view of it, as the most *regular* of the Regular Baptists can pretend to; and therefore, dear brother, we hold it to be utterly out of the question for us, even as Baptists, to view their error of sufficient enormity to justify their exclusion from the church of Christ, especially when we cannot shut our eyes on the humbling fact, that many of them far outstrip us in their zeal and devotedness to their God and Saviour.

Z. F.