

# THE CHRISTIAN

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

Vol. 1.

SAINT JOHN, N. B., MARCH, 1884.

No. 5.

## IS THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST UNDERSTOOD?

B. U. WATKINS.

(Concluded.)

If we look upon John's ministry as a new thing, entirely independent of the law, it is hard to explain why he performed no miracles; for Jews as uniformly sought after a sign, as the Greeks after wisdom.

Nor is it easy to see how, in the absence of such divine attestations, he gained such an immense influence over the Jewish people. When Jesus came, working the most stupendous miracles, they again and again insisted upon such exhibitions of his power. Inasmuch that Jesus says of them: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." The same thing would have been true of John's baptism, had it been a novelty. But how came these very Jews to believe John when he gave no signs or wonders?

The reason is obvious. John was teaching them their own law, which they had always believed but had shamefully neglected. As the law at that day needed no confirmation by miracle, so John the Restorer needed no more miraculous power in returning to the law, than we need in our efforts to restore the gospel.

But Christ came with a new institution; hence His mission needed divine attestation.

What was John doing down in the wilderness, which drew so many thousands and tens of thousands from Jerusalem and Judea, and all the regions round about Jordan? Was he preaching a new doctrine? If so, the people might have been anxious to hear him, but they would have been very chary as to heeding his doctrine, particularly as it would lead them to the confession of their sins. The Jews were not very prone to receive a new doctrine, even when attested with indubitable signs. Is it, therefore, likely that they would have received John's baptism as they did, had it been something entirely new?

This study of John's ministry has this to recommend it to every candid Bible student: It so beautifully explains the diverse baptisms of the law, referred to in Heb. ix. 10. The Septuagint version of the law—the one in common use in the days of Christ—has four words for the use of water in religious purifications. These are *raino* (to sprinkle), *pluno* (to wash one's clothes), *niplo* (to wash hands and feet), and *louo* (to bathe), *i. e.*, wash the whole body.

Now, according to Cruden's Condensed Concordance, *sprinkle* occurs but twelve times in the books of the law, and only six of these apply to persons; the rest were expended on inanimate objects, such as the mercy-seat, the tabernacle and houses of leprosy, etc. But *louo* (to bathe or wash the whole body) occurs some twenty-one times in the same book. And all of these cases are selected from personal applications. With these facts before him, who would think of referring the *diaphorais baptismois* of Heb. ix. 10 to the few cases of personal sprinkling of the law, when Moses reports more than twenty cases of legal immersion?

The first time the word sprinkle occurs in the

law, in connection with personal purification, is in Lev. xiv. 7-9: "And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from leprosy, seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the field. And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes and shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water, that he may be clean." But on the seventh day this shaving and bathing ceremony has all to be reenacted.

In short, the sprinklings of the law seem to have a preparatory signification. It prepared them for the final bathing, which was looked upon as the real cleansing.

But the bathings of the law were used on sundry occasions and for diverse purposes. They were used for the following cases:

(1) For priestly consecration. (2) For accidental contact with anything unclean. (3) For personal impurity. (4) For eating illegal food. (5) For the concluding act of purification after the application of the ashes and water.

So we can see that these were really *diaphorais baptismois*, as intimated in Heb. ix. 10.

But again the man that would not wash his clothes and "bathe his flesh, should bear his iniquity," (Levi. xvii. 16).

So we can see that John had strong backing in the law for his baptism of repentance; and we can also understand how those that rejected his baptism rejected the counsel of God against themselves.

## WHEEL-BARROW RELIGION.

Richard Baxter said a good thing when he said of some who lived in his day, that they had a wheel-barrow religion." They "went when they were shoved." It would be hard to find a better name for the religion of many who live now. Many people are very like wheel-barrow, and no-laborer plodding up and down a steep incline has harder and more weary work than those whose duty it is to push them. As often as not they are quite empty. They take what is put into them, whether it be good or worthless. Whatever knowledge or feeling of duty they have is proof of some one else's work. They are easily upset and emptied, and they have no power or will to get up again. They move as long as a firm hand grasps them and keeps them going. As soon as they are left to themselves they stop, and are helpless and useless until they are lifted. When they move it is up and down, backwards and forwards, never getting forward or showing any life of their own.

We do not blame a wheel-barrow for being what it was made to be, or for not showing the nature of a man. But it is quite too bad that reasonable, responsible creatures should show no more will or character than a wheel-barrow. A human being ought not only to hear truth, but so to lay hold of it and make it his own, that it may be a new power to him. He ought to seek God's light, and learn motives for right doing, so as to be able to watch for his way, and take it, and go on in it. He ought to know the

worth of God's grace and how to gain it, so as to need no urging to use the means rightly that he may grow in it and be strong.—*Presb. Chronicle*.

## SCATTERING AND INCREASING.

Now, you will find that liberal people are happy people, and get more enjoyment out of what they have than folks of a churlish mind. Misers never rest till they are put to bed with a shovel; they often get so wretched that they would hang themselves, only they grudge the expense of a rope. Generous souls are made happy by the happiness of others; the money they give to the poor buys them more pleasure than any other that they lay out. I have seen men of means give coppers, and they have been coppery in everything. They carried on a tin-pot business, lived like beggars and died like dogs. I have seen others give to the poor and to the cause of God by shovelfuls, and they have had it back by barrow-loads. They made good use of their stewardship, and the great Lord has trusted them with more, while the bells in their hearts have rung out merry peals when they have thought of widows who blessed them, and orphan children who smiled into their faces.—*John Ploughman's Pictures*.

## WHEN WE ARE RIGHT.

Many church-members think that if they do nothing wrong and make no trouble, they are all right. Not at all, sir; not at all. Here is a chariot and we are all engaged to drag it. Some of you do not put out your hand to pull; well, then, the rest of us have to labor so much the more, and the worst of it is, we have to draw you also. While you do not add to the strength which draws, you increase the weight that is to be drawn. It is all very well for you to say, "I do not hinder." You do hinder, and you cannot help hindering. If a man's leg does not help him in walking, it certainly hinders him. Oh, I cannot bear to think of it. That I should be a hindrance to my own soul's growth is bad indeed; but that I should stand in the way of the people of God and cool their courage and dampen their ardour—my Master, let it never be! Sooner let me sleep among the clods of the valley than be a hindrance to the nearest work that is done for Thy name!—*Spurgeon*.

WHAT WE WANT in Christ we always find in Him. When we want nothing we find nothing. When we want little we find little. When we want much we find much. But when we want everything, and get reduced to complete nakedness and beggary, we find in Him God's complete treasure-house, out of which comes gold and jewels, and garments to clothe us, wavy in the richness and glory of the Lord.—*Sears*.

LIFE, misfortune, isolation, abandonment and poverty, are battle-fields which have their heroes—obscure heroes, who are at times greater than illustrious heroes.—*Victor Hugo*.