

Baptist Principles Reset: Believers' Baptism

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A Spiritual, or Regenerate, Church Membership

A spiritual, or regenerate, church membership, as already stated, lies at the foundation of all Baptist peculiarities. On this point Baptists and the few small sects that agree with them differ from the whole Christian world. If numbers were an infallible sign of truth, we should be constrained to abandon our principles. But they are not. On this supposition, Protestantism would be compelled to yield to Romanism, and Christianity itself to paganism. The oracles of God are the only infallible test of truth. To these we appeal.

The Israelitish theocracy, or commonwealth, differed widely from the Christian church, or, more properly, churches. That institution—a politico-religious organization—consisted only of the descendants of Abraham, in the line of Jacob, or Israel, with such foreigners as chose, by submission to a painful and bloody rite, to become incorporated with the nation. Citizenship in the commonwealth was hereditary, and was maintained, not by regeneration and a life of piety, but by the observance of various costly rites. The government was designed and admirably adapted to preserve the nation from commingling with the neighboring heathen. To the Israelites were committed the oracles of God and the honor of maintaining his worship amid the gloom of surrounding idolatry. From that favored race the Messiah was to descend, in whom all nations were to be blessed.

In the fullness of time, Jesus of Nazareth made his appearance. He claimed to be the promised Messiah, and confirmed his title to the office by the wisdom of his words and the number and greatness of his miracles. He came, not to establish or to modify the “commonwealth of Israel,” but to introduce a new dispensation, or order of things. After a brief but most instructive, ministry, terminating in his sacrificial death, he endowed his apostles with plenary inspiration and the power of working miracles, and entrusted to them the duty of carrying into effect his gracious and sublime mission.

In the execution of the plan, the apostles organized churches, first in Judea, then in Samaria and Galilee, and afterwards among the heathen nations throughout the Roman empire. These churches were not a continuation of the Jewish hierarchy. They differed from it widely in members, doctrine, rites, worship, and discipline. No man was entitled to a place in a Christian church because of his connection with a synagogue. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, could not share in the blessings of the new kingdom without regeneration. Under the changed order of things, circumcision, which was a passport to the privileges of the synagogue, availed nothing. All the rites and ceremonies of the Levitical economy were abolished under the new dispensation. The truth, which had been symbolically and dimly revealed to the Jews, was clearly taught in the churches. Repen-

tance, faith, regeneration, were conditions of admission to their fellowship, and holy lives were essential to its continuance. Instead of the blood sacrifices of the Jews, the churches offered up “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” In fine, the commonwealth of Israel was a hierarchy; but the churches are voluntary associations. That was typical, preparatory, and temporary; these are spiritual and permanent.

Having made these general remarks, we will now proceed to prove their correctness. John the Baptist, the morning star of the new dispensation, was an eminent reformer. He preached repentance and the necessity of godly lives, laid the axe at the root of the trees which did not bear good fruit, and proclaimed that descent from Abraham, which secured all the benefits of Judaism, would avail nothing under the reign of the Messiah. He baptized the penitent for the remission of sins; but he organized no church among his disciples. His mission was to prepare the way of the Messiah, by awaking an expectation of his coming, making ready a people to receive him, and introducing him into his public ministry; and, having done these things, his work was ended (Mt 3:1-12, Mk 1:1-11, Lk 3:2-22; Jn 3:28-31).

The personal ministry of Jesus was preparatory to the constitution of churches. His preaching was eminently searching, and fitted to reform men and make them spiritual and devout; but during his life no church was organized, and his disciples were subject to no discipline, and their labors, except so far as they were directed by his personal attention, were without concert.

On the day of Pentecost, after the ascension of Jesus, the apostles, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, were fully

qualified to carry forward and complete the work that John and Jesus had begun. The first church was formed in Jerusalem, and this soon became the mother of other churches in various countries. We have at present no concern with them, but to show that they were composed exclusively of believers—converts to Christianity—or persons who made a credible profession of piety. The mother church was clearly a spiritual one. The 120 disciples who held a continuous prayer meeting in Jerusalem were its nucleus (Ac 1:14-15). To these were added 3,000 believers on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:41). Additions were daily made to the church, but only of such as were saved (2:47). To this company was added Joses, sur-named Barnabas, who signalized his conversion by his liberality to the cause of Christ (Ac 4:36-37). After the death of Ananias and Sapphira, the ungodly were deterred from joining the church; “but believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Ac 5:13-14). After the appointment of deacons, “The word of God increased, and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Ac 6:7). This was *the true church*. Are we not justified in affirming that it was composed of believers, and of believers only? There is not the slightest trace in the copious inspired record that in this large, primitive, model church there were unconverted seekers, or infants, or hereditary members. The church was organized under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit and according to the will of Christ, and we have a full and infallible account of its membership, for the instruction of church builders in all ages. Is it possible that, on the Pedobaptist theory of church construction, there

should have been no reference to its infant members? Among the thousands of believers added to the church, did none claim the covenant blessing for their children? Or did the faithful historian fail to mention so important a fact?

Had we no other proof that the primitive churches were composed exclusively of believers, the history of the church at Jerusalem should fully satisfy us on that point. It is perfectly fair to conclude that all the churches were conformed, in their membership, as in other things, to the mother church. On this point, however, evidence is ample. The second church was probably organized in Samaria. We have not so full an account of its constitution as we have of that at Jerusalem, but quite enough to guide us to a right conclusion. After the persecution of the disciples consequent on the death of Stephen, "Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them." Many of the Samaritans gave heed to his words and were joyfully converted. "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ they were baptized, both men and women" (Ac 8:12). We have no definite account of the organization of the church, but there can be no reasonable doubt that these believing men and women were its constituent members. Children were not among the baptized, nor can we reasonably suppose that they were admitted into the church.

In the Acts of the Apostles, covering a period of more than thirty years, and recording the labors of the apostles and their assistants in founding and edifying churches in a large part of the Roman empire, there is not the slightest evidence, or shadow of evidence, except that supposed to be furnished by household bap-

tisms, (which will be hereafter examined), that any persons were admitted to membership in the churches except on a credible profession of faith, or retained in them, by apostolic sanction, without lives in harmony with their profession.

The proof furnished by the apostolic epistles in favor of the spiritual membership of the primitive churches is quite as conclusive as that drawn from their inspired history. Let us briefly examine it.

Paul addressed his first epistle in the canon, "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints," and thanked God that their faith was "spoken of throughout the world" (Ro 1:7-8). If the church contained other members, either adults or infants, the fact does not appear in the long letter. Human ingenuity has not been able to find in all its chapters a single allusion, or shadow of allusion, to any other than a regenerate membership.

The next epistle in course was directed by the apostle "Unto the church of God in Corinth," but, that there might be no mistake as to its membership, he adds, "to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," (1 Co 1:2). The second epistle was addressed by Paul and Timothy, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia," (2 Co 1:1). We think that it is impossible to find in these letters, copious as they are in instruction, the slightest sanction of an unregenerate church membership.

The next epistle was addressed by Paul, not to a single church, but to the churches of the large province of Galatia. "Grace be to you and peace," he said, "from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." The apostle did not use such language as this to the unconverted. Only believers are the recipients of grace and peace. Of the Unbelieving his language was: "If any man love not

the Lord Jesus Christ let him be *anathema maranatha*." We can find in this epistle no trace of infant church membership.

We must abridge our labors on this point. The epistle to the Ephesians was addressed "to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph 1:1). The letter to the Philippians was directed "to all the saints in Christ Jesus" (Php 1:1). The epistle to the Colossians was addressed "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse" (Col 1:2).

If there were unconverted seekers or infants in the apostolic churches, is it not strange and inexplicable that the apostle in his epistles should have taken no notice of them? They must have constituted a large and important part of the churches. Many questions must have arisen concerning the relations which they bore to the churches and the responsibilities arising from them. Were they members in full fellowship or only nominal members? Were they entitled to partake of the Lord's supper? Were they subject to discipline as other members? Should they be formally expelled from the churches, if they furnished no evidence of piety? If they ceased to be members by lack of piety, at what age and under what circumstances did their membership terminate? Is it possible that these difficulties should not have arisen in the primitive churches, if they contained infant members? How is it to be explained that the Spirit of inspiration, so full of light and love, left the churches in utter ignorance on questions so vitally affecting their interests?

All these difficulties are obviated and all these questions are explained by a spiritual church membership. The primitive churches were composed of believers, and of believers only, and all the facts

recorded in the inspired history and all the instructions in the inspired epistles are in perfect harmony with this fundamental principle of church organization.

Baptism a Condition of Church Membership

Baptism is a Christian ordinance. It originated in the wisdom, goodness, and authority of God. John was divinely commissioned to baptize. Jesus honored the ordinance of baptism by receiving it at the hands of John. When Jesus entered on his public ministry, he continued the administration of baptism, through the agency of his disciples (Jn 4:2, 3). The ordinance occupies an important place in the great commission which Jesus, after his resurrection, gave to the apostles for evangelizing the world (Mt 28:19, 20). No man can intelligently and candidly read the New Testament without perceiving that baptism is of solemn import and designed to exert a momentous influence in the kingdom of Christ.

It has been shown already that the first church was organized in the city of Jerusalem, after the ascension of Jesus, and was composed entirely of believers. This church was formed exclusively of Jews. No Gentile was admitted, or could have been admitted for some years after its constitution, to a participation of its privileges. The Jews were not received into it in virtue of their descent from Abraham, or their interest in the covenant that God made with him, or their circumcision, or their good standing in the hierarchy. Still more, they were not admitted into it simply because of their repentance, faith, and regeneration. Peter, standing in the midst of the great pentecostal assembly, with a cloven tongue of fire upon him, to symbolize his plenary inspiration, said: "Repent and be baptized,

every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Ac 2:38). Repentance was an indispensable duty—it implied faith and the new birth—a great moral change; but it was not enough to secure a participation in the privileges of the church then in the process of formation. It was a visible body, and a divinely prescribed outward act, in confession of repentance, faith, and the remission of sins, through the name of Jesus Christ, was an essential condition of a formal union with it. To this inspired order the converts all conformed. "Then they that gladly received" Peter's "word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (2:41). There is no misconceiving the meaning of this language. The converts were baptized before they entered the church. Of the multitudes, not one was added to the church without baptism.

We must notice briefly the significance of this transaction. Jesus, after he was risen from the dead, remained forty days with his apostles, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Ac 1:3). We cannot doubt that his instructions were comprehensive and minute. The apostles were liable, however, to misunderstand or forget his teaching; but, to preserve them from the possibility of error, they were commanded to remain until they "should be endued with power from on high"; that is, receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49, Ac 1:5). Are we not bound to believe that the apostles, on the day of Pentecost having been "endued with power from on high," said and did just what was according to the will of Christ, and designed to be for the guidance of his disciples in all ages? What they required of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, in order to admission into the church,

was required of them at all places, at all times, and under all circumstances, for the same purpose.

If baptism was demanded of the Jews as a prerequisite of church membership, we may reasonably conclude that the Gentiles were not admitted to the privilege except on the same condition. The Jews, as some Pedobaptists maintain, were already members of the church, and had received the rite of circumcision, for which baptism is merely a substitute; and yet the Jews—even rulers of the Jews, and priests, though they had been circumcised and were devout—could not be admitted into the church at Jerusalem, or into any other church, without baptism. Certainly, then, the heathen, ignorant of God and his worship, were not received into the churches without this divinely appointed, public, solemn, and impressive acknowledgment of the authority of Christ and the enjoyment of the remission of sins through his blood.

We are not, however, left to any uncertain inference on this momentous subject. We have definite scriptural information concerning it. Peter, instructed by a vision from heaven, went from Joppa to Caesarea, where he found Cornelius, a Roman officer and a Gentile, who had been directed by a holy angel to assemble "his kinsmen and near friends," all Gentiles, to hear the words of the apostle. Peter preached the gospel to them; and while he was speaking, "the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word." It was a renewal of the wonders of the day of Pentecost. The Christian Jews accompanying Peter were astonished at this effusion of the Holy Ghost on the Gentiles. They had not anticipated such a display of divine grace on behalf of the heathen. The miracle, however, was undeniable, and Peter, guided by the Spirit of inspiration, promptly saw and admitted all

its consequences. He did not say: "God has received these Gentiles, and they may dispense with baptism; they have received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and water baptism can do them no good; as God has accepted them, the church also is bound to accept them." No; the events of the pentecostal reformation had not faded from his memory. He recollected the divine order concerning the Jews, and, seeing that it was applicable to the Gentiles, said: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Their baptism was not a matter of choice, or taste, or convenience, but a solemn duty. "He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Ac 10:24-48).

There can be no good reason to suppose that, as these first Gentile converts were baptized under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit, preparatory to church membership, other Gentiles were admitted into the churches without baptism. There surely can be no solid reason furnished why the ordinance, which was obligatory on the first and most favored converts from heathenism, is not the duty of all Gentile believers.

The apostolic churches, so far as we have definite information of their constituency, were all composed of baptized believers. Paul, writing to the saints at Rome, and classing himself among them, said: "We are buried with him (Christ) by baptism into death" (Ro 6:4). Paul preached the gospel in Corinth, and "many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized" (Ac 18:8). These baptized believers doubtless constituted the church in that city. Writing to them afterwards, and reproving them for their divisions, he inquired, "Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" He takes it for

granted as well that they had been baptized as that they had not been baptized in the name of Paul. He had baptized Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanas; but there is no cause to conclude that, as these members were baptized by the apostle, other members were left without the ordinance (1 Co 1:13-16). Moreover, Paul, in writing to the church in Corinth, after enumerating the gross vices prevalent among the Gentiles, says: "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Co 6:11). In this passage, "washed" is generally supposed by commentators to mean "baptized"; and, indeed, as distinguished from "sanctified" and "justified," we do not see what else it can mean. We may fairly conclude, then, that the church in the city of Corinth was composed exclusively of baptized persons. Lydia and her household, and the jailer and his family, who constituted the nucleus of the church at Philippi, were all baptized; and there is no ground to conclude that the other members of the church did not submit to the ordinance (Ac 16:15, 33). To the church in Colosse the apostle wrote: "Ye are...buried with him (Christ) in baptism" (Col 2:12).

As both Jews and Gentiles were admitted into the church by baptism, as several of the churches we know were composed wholly of baptized members, and as all the churches were under the same Lord and the same law, it is clear that baptism was a condition of membership in the primitive churches.

Baptism is not essential to salvation, but is in many cases essential to obedience, and obedience is essential to salvation. "The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not

being baptized with the baptism of John” (Lk 6:30). Those who reject the counsel of God cannot be wise or in safety, and the apostolic baptism is not less the counsel of God than was that of John (Jn 15:14). Christ has made it obligatory on all who would enter his church, and that is enough to control the conduct of those who love him.

We have, perhaps, unnecessarily extended this argument. No evidence, or semblance of evidence, can be furnished from the Scriptures that any person was ever received into an apostolic church without baptism. Indeed, there is no point concerning which Christians of all denominations and parties are more united than in maintaining the necessity of baptism to church membership. There is no large and settled church or sect that does not make baptism a condition of admission to its privileges.

Believers the Only Subjects of Baptism

If, as we have shown, the churches of Christ were composed exclusively of believers who had been voluntarily baptized, we may reasonably expect to find the ordinance restricted to believers. Our knowledge on the subject must be derived wholly from the New Testament. As the rite is peculiar to the new dispensation, the Scriptures of the Old Testament contain no allusion to it. Let us come, then, to the common version of the New Testament and examine it honestly and carefully, that we may learn what it teaches concerning the subjects of baptism.

That the baptism of John was restricted to the penitent is, so far as we know, unquestioned. “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” In

our opinion, the differences between the baptism of John and that of the apostles, after the ascension of Jesus, were circumstantial, and not fundamental. The discussion of this question, however, would lead us too far from our purpose, and it is not necessary for its accomplishment. We have introduced the subject to make a single remark. If John’s baptism and the baptism of Christ’s disciples, before his crucifixion, were limited to penitent believers, and the apostolic baptism, after his resurrection from the dead, was extended to the unconverted children of baptized believers, is it not strange and inexplicable that so radical a change should have taken place in the administration of the ordinance without any distinct mention of it, or even a slight reference to it? If there was no such change, the omission is easily understood.

Baptism is a positive or legal institution. It is of no obligation except from the divine will, and as that will is revealed to us. The question concerning it should be—*not* What thinkest thou? but, How readest thou? It is what God wills it to be—nothing more and nothing less. Let us turn, then, to the law of Christian baptism? Matthew 28:19-20 says: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” All positive laws must be strictly construed. The command to make disciples and baptize them differs widely from the command to baptize persons and then make disciples of them. How did the apostles understand their grand commission? “Teach all nations, baptizing them”—not nations in the gross, good, bad, and indifferent, but the taught, disciples; “teaching them”—the baptized dis-

ciples "to observe all things." This was the plain construction of the language. How would the training of the apostles lead them to understand it? They were not ignorant on the subject of baptism. They had attended on the ministrations of John and seen that his baptisms were limited to penitents, who brought forth the fruits of repentance. Some of them certainly, probably all of them, had received baptism at his hands (Jn 1:37-40). They and their fellow-laborers had baptized more disciples than John. They knew nothing of any baptism except the baptism of disciples. How is it possible, then, that they should have understood their commission except in its plain sense? It changed the formula, but not the subjects of the rite?

The interpretation which the apostles put on the language of their commission we may learn clearly and certainly from their practice. They proceeded, in a few days, under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the execution of their sacred trust. On the day of Pentecost—the most memorable day in the history of Christian churches—only those were baptized who "gladly received his (Peter's) word"; that is, who heartily embraced the gospel (Ac 2:41).

In every subsequent account of the administration of baptism (except in the cases of household baptisms, which will receive timely consideration), it is clear that the rite was limited to believers. Philip was the first evangelist who carried the gospel beyond the limits of Judea. He went down to Samaria and preached Christ with great success. "The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake." "There was great joy in that city." Now surely we shall learn how the apostles and their fellow-disciples understood the law of baptism. The evangelist followed the

example of the pentecostian laborers. "When they (the Samaritans) believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Ac 8:12).

It is not necessary to mention at length the baptism of the Ethiopian treasurer (Ac 8:36-38), of Saul of Tarsus (9:18), of Cornelius and his friends, the first Gentile converts (10:47), and the Corinthians (18:8), who, according to the terms of the commission and the practice of the apostles, before and after the resurrection of Jesus, were all baptized after they were made disciples.

We will close this argument with the statement of an interesting event illustrative of it. Luther Rice was one of the most clear-headed men that we have ever known. He was sent by the Congregationalists as a missionary to India. It was his lot to make the voyage in company with two English Baptist missionaries. With one of them, a man of some learning and acuteness, he frequently discussed the subject of baptism. Rice found no difficulty in replying to his arguments, and took great pleasure in perplexing him by questions. One evening, at the close of a protracted discussion, the other Baptist missionary, a plain sensible man, who had listened silently to the debate, said: "If a man had never heard of infant baptism, he might read through the New Testament without ever thinking of it." Rice hastily thought of the Scriptures relating to baptism, but felt a little disconcerted at his inability to remember a text that certainly had reference to the practice. The remark haunted him. He resolved to examine the Scriptures more carefully on the subject. The more he searched them, the more painfully he was convinced of their silence

concerning infant baptism. He had no doubt but that they taught it; but just where or how he could not perceive. He had great confidence in the learning and astuteness of Judson, who had preceded him in the voyage to India. He resolved to postpone the investigation of the subject until he could have the aid of his able fellow-missionary.

On reaching his destination and meeting Judson, he proceeded at length and very carefully to state his difficulties regarding infant baptism. Judson, having heard him patiently, quietly replied that his objections were unanswerable. Rice was confounded at the concession, and greatly grieved to find that Judson was on the point of being immersed on a profession of his faith.

Rice resolved at once to dismiss the subject from his mind. He had been sent out by the Congregationalists, and was dependent on them for support. His defection would hinder the success of the mission, or might even destroy it. Whatever might be true in regard to baptism, it would be unwise to pursue a course fraught with so many evil consequences. Thus he reasoned; but his conscience was truer than his head. Meditation and prayer brought him to the conclusion that it is better to please God than men, and that the way to be useful is to do right. So soon as he was willing to follow the convictions of his conscience, his doubts and difficulties were all dissipated. The path of duty was straight and plain before him. He was baptized, returned to the United States, awakened the Baptist denomination on the subject of missions and of education, and contributed more than any man, dead or living, to their prosperity, growth, influence, and usefulness.

Let us not lose sight of the argument in

our interest in the story. If infant baptism is a divine ordinance, it is obligatory on all Christian parents. The Scriptures were written for their instruction in righteousness. Is it not strange that they should contain no clear information concerning the rite? The duty of the Israelitish parents to circumcise their children, and of all believers to be baptized, is plain enough—a child may see it written as with a sunbeam; but the duty of parents to have their children baptized can be found only by diligent search and ingenious interpretations of Scripture, and multitudes cannot find it at all.

The Baptism of “Households” in Acts

Pedobaptists are not agreed as to the reasons for baptizing infants. Some baptize them because they are holy and worthy to receive it, and others because they are sinful and need its influence. Some derive their right to the ordinance from household baptisms, and others from the Abrahamic covenant and circumcision. Many, admitting that it is not of divine authority, practice it because it is a beautiful, appropriate, and useful ceremony. We must notice some of these pleas for the rite.

Before entering on an examination of the baptized households, we must offer a few general remarks. First, then, all families do not contain children, and particularly young children. In every neighborhood, houses may be found in which there are no infants. To base a positive Christian institution on the possibility or probability—for *certainty* there cannot be—that there were little children in the three or four families of whose baptism we read in the Scriptures, and that these children were baptized, is quite adventurous. Statute law is specific and

positive, not inferential, and surely leaves no place for conjecture. Moreover, families are frequently spoken of in distinction from infants or without regard to them. If it is affirmed that a man has an intelligent or a pious family, nobody concludes that he has no infants in his household, or that they are intelligent or pious. The remark is naturally and universally supposed to refer to that part of the family of whom intelligence or piety may be reasonably predicated. The person who should infer from the statement that the family contained infants, and that they were distinguished for their knowledge or godliness, would prove himself to be a sophist, or something more unfortunate.

How would the baptism of households be understood by the primitive Christians? The command was to baptize disciples, and all the early baptisms, if household baptisms be excepted, were in harmony with the command. How natural, then, was it for them to understand by household baptisms the baptism of such members of the families as were capable of complying with the prescribed conditions of the ordinance—such as had been instructed, and, under the influence of instruction, had repented and believed the gospel. They could hardly have imagined that these baptisms set aside the divine law of baptism and disregarded the example of the apostles, given under circumstances of so great solemnity in Jerusalem and Caesarea. Surely nothing short of inspired testimony could have convinced them that household baptisms differed so widely from baptisms administered by the apostles under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, and on occasions of the most profound interest.

Let us now examine the household baptisms in detail, that we may see what

light they shed on infant baptism. We have an account of the baptism of four households in the New Testament—those of Cornelius, Stephanas, the jailer, and Lydia. We will notice them in the order in which we have named them.

The baptism of the family of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, is not definitely mentioned; but the fact is unquestionable. By divine direction, he sent to Joppa for Peter, to learn what he ought to do. Cornelius waited for the apostle in Caesarea, and “called together his kinsmen and near friends” to hear him. Peter preached to them the gospel. It was the first sermon delivered to the Gentiles, and God accompanied it with an extraordinary demonstration of his favor. “The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word,” and they spake “with tongues and did magnify God”; and the apostle “commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” That the family of Cornelius were all included among the converts, there is no ground to question. They would surely have been called with his other kindred to hear so important a message, under circumstances of such thrilling interest; especially as we are informed that the centurion “feared God, with all his house.” This household baptism offers no support to infant baptism, but is in perfect harmony with the law of baptism and the apostolic practice on the day of Pentecost. Cornelius was the head of a family that revered the true God, heard the gospel, received the gift of the Holy Ghost, glorified God, and were baptized in the name of Jesus. We are decidedly in favor of the baptism of all such households (Ac 10:2, 24, 44, 46-48).

“I baptized,” said Paul, “the household of Stephanas” (1 Co 1:16). The apostle visited Corinth about A.D. 54 or 55, where

he remained “a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Ac 18:11). During this time, he baptized Stephanas and his family. In the year A.D. 59, or thereabouts, he wrote his first letter to “the church of God” in that city. In the epistle he makes special reference to the house of Stephanas. “I beseech you, brethren,” said he, “(ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) that ye submit yourselves unto such” (1 Co 16:15, 16). Several points are worthy of notice in this text. The family of Stephanas were “the first fruits of Achaia.” This term is applied to the regenerate. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (Jas 1:18; see also Rev 14:4). The word is never used, so far as we know, to denote unconscious or unregenerate infants. This family, in four or five years after their baptism, devoted “themselves to the ministry of the saints,” whether in preaching the word or supplying the wants of the poor, we do not know. It was a benevolent, noble service, commended by the Spirit of inspiration. If they were infants baptized by Paul, four or five years previously, they were the most precocious children that we have read of. Nor is this all. The apostle besought the Corinthian saints, renowned throughout the world for their spiritual gifts (1 Co 1:7), to “submit” themselves “unto such” as “the house of Stephanas.” They were not only the benefactors of the church, but fitted to bear rule in it. They were not infants, not children; nor were they at the time of their baptism. It ought in fairness to be conceded that the baptism of the house of Stephanas yields no support to infant baptism, but lends its full weight to the ex-

clusive baptism of believers.

We must now notice the baptism of the household of the Philippian jailer, recorded in Acts 16:24-34. Paul, divinely guided, passed for the first time into Europe, and commenced his ministrations at a Roman post called Philippi. Here several persons were converted and baptized, and a great persecution was commenced against Paul and Silas. They were arrested, scourged, and committed to the hands of the jailer, under strict charge to keep them safely. He cast them into the dungeon and made their feet fast in the stocks. They were delivered from their bondage by divine interposition, and the jailer was saved from suicide by the friendly counsel of Paul. We shall notice the narrative only so far as it relates to the point under discussion. The jailer brought Paul and Silas into his house, and “they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and *to all that were in his house*” (16:32). We might infer from the excitement and importance of the occasion, that all the jailer’s family were present; but there is no room left for conjecture. The historian tells us positively that the word was preached “*to all that were in the house.*” What was the result of this instruction? The jailer, in the “same hour of the night...was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (16:33). That there might be no possible plea for infant baptism found in this narrative, the inspired writer adds: “He (the jailer) brought them (Paul and Silas) into his house,...and rejoiced, *believing in God, with all his house*” (16:34). It is incomprehensible to us that any man of intelligence and candor should doubt that the jailer’s family were converts to Christianity. There is precisely the same evidence of their conversion that there is of his. Did he hear the word of the Lord? So did they. Did he believe in

Christ? So did they. Was he baptized? So were they. The whole narrative corresponds with the apostolic commission and practice in Jerusalem and Caesarea. The order observed was instruction, faith, baptism. The ingenious reasoner who can derive authority for infant baptism from this narrative can find it anywhere.

Only the baptism of Lydia's household remains to be considered. Acts 16:14, 15: "A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household..." Were there infants in Lydia's family? The burden of proof lies on the advocates of pedobaptism, who would derive authority for their practice from this passage. We have shown incontrovertibly, as it seems to us, that in three baptized households there were no children, or that they were not included among the baptized. Does not this fact create a strong presumption that there were none in Lydia's house? We will perform, however, a work of supererogation. While we cannot positively prove that Lydia had no infant children, we can show the extreme improbability that she had any. She was a dealer in purple goods, of the city of Thyatira, in the province of Asia, several hundred miles distant from Philippi. She was probably an adventurer, with no permanent home. She, it is likely, had no husband. She said to Paul and Silas, "Come into my house and abide." If she had a husband, he seems to have been of no importance in the family. If she were married, there is no proof that she had children; and if she had children, there is no evidence that they were infants or minors. Her family probably consisted of the servants and helpers in her mercantile shop. When Paul and

Silas were released from prison, and forced hastily to leave the city, they "entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them and departed" (16:40). Who were these brethren in Lydia's house? They were not infants or young children, but persons capable of receiving religious consolation and encouragement. If there were nothing to bias the mind, it would be almost impossible to avoid the conclusion that the brethren referred to were Lydia's baptized household. If infant baptism has no better foundation than the probability that there were infants in the family of Lydia, and that they were baptized, it ought to be abandoned.

Let us test the strength of the argument drawn from the baptism of households in support of infant baptism by a parallel case. There were believing as well as baptized households. Of the nobleman of Cana it is said: "Himself believed, and his whole house" (Jn 4:53). We read: "Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord, with all his house" (Ac 18:8). What would we think of the acumen of a logician who should reason after this manner: We read in the Scriptures of believing families; infants are found in most families; therefore, in the apostolic times, infants believed the gospel. The conclusion is a manifest absurdity, and consequently nobody reasons in that way; but the argument is quite as logical and the inference quite as conclusive as that which attempts to deduce infant baptism from the baptism of households.

The argument in favor of infant baptism derived from household baptisms proves quite too much for those who employ it. If families are to be baptized on the faith of their parents, why should the baptisms be limited to infants? Are not adult children, as well as servants, as of-

ten found in families as infants? If families are to be baptized, why not baptize the whole of them? By what authority is the ordinance limited to infants and little children? The jailer “was baptized—he and *all his*.” If family connection is a plea for baptism, why should it not avail for adults as well as infants?

Perhaps it will be said that faith is required of adults, in order to their baptism. Certainly it is, of those who act on their own responsibility; but households, according to the pedobaptist theory, are baptized on the faith and by the authority of the parents. If households are to be baptized in virtue of their relation to their pious heads, why should any portion of the family be excluded from the privilege? The Israelites were required to circumcise all the males in their families, free and bond, at the age of eight days; but if, from any cause, the rite was neglected, it was proper to perform it at any period of life (Ge 17:13, Jos 5:8). Circumcision was a family institution, and all its male members were entitled to its benefits. Baptism is supposed by the advocates of the infant rite to be a substitute for circumcision. By what plea, then, do they limit the baptism of households to the baptism of infants? That is not household baptism. It is the baptism of a part, usually a small part, and that too, the least important part, of the family; and the discrimination, so far as we can discern, is arbitrarily made.