

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

THE BAPTISMAL QUESTION.

No. VIII.

HARMONY BETWEEN THE BAPTISM OF BELIEVERS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT DISPENSATION.

Part I.

§ Explanatory.

In 2 Cor. iii. 6-11 Paul supplies a series of contrasts between the ministration of the Old Testament and that of the New. On the one hand we have "the letter—the ministration of condemnation;" and on the other "the Spirit—the ministration of the Spirit—the ministration of righteousness." There are thus, we learn, two grand leading "ministrations," or dispensations, as we may term them, brought before us in the Word of God. These dispensations had each of them their institutions, or "ordinances of divine service," as Paul elsewhere calls them. And these institutions were in harmony with the different dispensations under which they were given. This thought is capable of enlarged and interesting illustration. I refer to it here, however, only for the sake of its bearing upon my present object. We have here the New Testament dispensation, with its ordinance of baptism. In regard to this ordinance there is much controversy. I here assume, that the Baptist interpretation of the ordinance is the correct one. I shall endeavour to shew that that interpretation harmonizes well with the spirit and aims of the New Testament dispensation; after which I shall proceed to apply my conclusions to the purpose contemplated in the present series of articles.

§ I. Christ Supreme.

I begin with the remark, that the Gospel evermore assigns to Christ the loftiest supremacy. It makes him "Head over all things for the church," and in it. It is the latter thought that I here have more immediately in view. In point of fact Christ has been supreme under every dispensation. "The angel of Jehovah," of whom we read so much in the Old Testament, was plainly the Messenger Jehovah—the Son of God, sent forth from the presence of his Father, to work his will on earth. Paul tells us, that Moses "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." In Exodus it is JEHOVAH for whose sake Moses left all, and endured all. John tells us, that "Isaiah saw the glory of Christ, and spake of him." The prophet himself tells us, that it was JEHOVAH whose glory he beheld in the temple, and from whom he received his commission. Thus it is Christ, throughout the whole of the Old Testament as well as the New, made known as Lord of all, and ruling among his people from the beginning. Yet was he not so distinctly revealed in this respect in Old Testament times as he is in New. To his ancient people God was known more as the God of the patriarchs, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, than under any other name. Moses, too, was the mediator under whose ministry the Jewish dispensation was set up, and through whom heaven and earth were brought into friendly intercourse. Christ was there, indeed, but he was hidden behind the ministrations of his servants, until the time had come in which he should appear and act in his own proper character. But now all this is changed. The God of the New Testament is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The creed of the New Testament is, that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." To this great Mediator Moses and Elijah delivered up their commission in the Mount of Transfiguration; and thenceforth "the law and the prophets" were merged in Christ. "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion," is the announcement of the Old Testament. And in the New Testament this "King" thus pleads with his Father,—"Thou hast given him [thy Son] power over all flesh;" and thus he proclaims his dignity in the preamble to the apostolic commission,—"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." The commission itself is just so much lofty inference from these lofty premises:—"Go ye, THEREFORE, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

§ Believers' baptism bows to the Supremacy of Christ.

To the claims of Christ as thus set forth in

Scripture believers' baptism is beautifully adjusted. In conformity with the enactment just recited, we find New Testament believers constantly baptized. And it is remarkable, that they are repeatedly said to have been "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." No doubt the formula prescribed in the commission was from the first employed in the administration of baptism. Yet nowhere is that formula recited in the inspired accounts of such administration, while "the name of the Lord Jesus" conspicuously stands forth in such accounts.

The case of Saul of Tarsus is here strikingly in point. In writing to the Galatians he thus sums up his early religious history:—"Ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it; and profited in the Jews' religion above many mine equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." Suiten down by the vision of the ascended Lord in his way to Damascus, "Lord!" says he, "what wilt thou have me to do?" He inquires no more as to the precept of Moses, or the commentaries of Gamaliel. It is, "Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?" By and by, sent to him by the same Lord who had "appeared to him in the way." Ananias visits him in Damascus. The precept now is, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Not a syllable have we here about any old law, "Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." Without delay Saul arose, and was baptized. Far indeed was he from any idea of being conformed therein, in any way, to the teachings of Moses—from any such dream as that baptism had been given under the Gospel instead of circumcision under the law. On the contrary, he wrote his epistle to the Galatians to shew how Christ, in every respect, had abolished and superseded Moses by his own superior authority. In this same epistle, moreover, unlike our modern Pædobaptists, he pays but small deference to circumcision; treating it in a way which seems scarcely intelligible, had he regarded it as the forerunner of Christian baptism. (See Gal. v. 1-11.) In regard to the supremacy of Christ he thus writes, in his epistle to the Hebrews; rendering a well deserved tribute to Moses, but placing him in every way in subordination to our Great Head:—"Moses, verily, was faithful in all his house, as a servant; . . . but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we."

Such, then, is Christ, the Lord of Moses, as well as our Lord. Such is his position in his church; supreme over all; eclipsing and outshining Moses and all besides. Immersed by John in Jordan he bowed to the baptismal rite, that "in all things" he might be "made like unto his brethren." But even then he spake with authority, saying, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness;" and the Father confirmed that authority, in the "voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." To which authority every baptized believer cheerfully submits himself, when, in the moment of his submersion, he at once "puts on Christ," and crowns him as his Head and Lord.

§ II. "Christ is all."

"Ye are all one in Christ Jesus," writes Paul to the Galatians. And again, in writing to the Colossians, he says, "Christ is ALL." Now, looking at these expressions in their context, we gather, that nothing that is merely external to a man, or circumstantial, has any thing to do with his relation to Christ, or his salvation by Christ. Not nationality. "There is neither Jew nor Greek—Barbarian, Scythian." Not condition. "There is neither bond nor free." Not sex. "There is neither male, nor female." Not even religious observances. "Circumcision, nor uncircumcision." No! "Christ is all." That he will be, or he will be nothing. In the great matter of justification, for instance, it is he that works, and he alone. "By him," says Paul, "all that believe are justified from all things, from which [they] could not be justified by the law of Moses." So, too, in the matter of sanctification. It is "the blood of Christ" that purgeth our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. And so of all else that pertains to the great business of salvation. Yes! "Christ is all—the Author and Finisher of our faith." Saints on earth own this, when they desire to "be found in him, not having [their own] righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Saints in heaven own this, when, in their anthems, they ascribe "salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." The very martyrs own this, who "have washed their

robes, and made them white," not in their own blood, but "in the blood of the Lamb." Nor will a long eternity of sinless obedience before the celestial throne wear out our obligations to "Him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." For ever and ever, in the aspect here contemplated, Christ will be to his people just such as he is now. Yes! "Christ is all," in all his saints, throughout all eternity.

§ Believers' baptism owns all this.

Now the baptism of believers, as prescribed by the New Testament, is in perfect harmony with all this. Mark the order in which it is enjoined. "He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved." The faith must come before the baptism in which that faith is professed. And the salvation flows, not from the baptism, but from the truths set forth in baptism. So when Paul argues out the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God, as in his epistle to the Romans, he says not a word about baptism until he has fully unfolded his doctrine; and then, as in Rom. vi. 3-5, he introduces it incidentally, as a motive to sanctification, and by no means as the basis of justification. So, too, in the epistle to the Galatians, where he defends his doctrine of justification by faith alone, without works, against Judaizing teachers. Here, on the one hand, he will not allow that circumcision has any influence upon the justification of a sinner before God. Then, on the other, while he tells the Galatians, "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," it is not until he has laid down the position, "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." The faith, again, is here before the baptism. It is the faith, too, that makes the man a child of God, and not the baptism. And in baptism he "puts on," by profession only, that "Christ" into whom he has already been introduced "by faith."

§ Baptism and remission of sins.

There are indeed certain passages which are supposed by some to teach a contrary doctrine, as though baptism exerted some direct influence upon the pardon and salvation of sinners. I refer here to Mark i. 4. Acts ii. 38. xxii. 16. Heb. x. 22. 1 Pet. iii. 21. But how stands the case in regard to these passages? If John the Baptist "preaches the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," he also points to "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." If Peter exhorts the Pentecostal penitents to "be baptized . . . for the remission of sins," that remission is to be obtained "in the name of Jesus Christ." If Ananias summons Saul of Tarsus to "arise, and be baptized, washing away his sins," he fails not to add, "calling upon the name of the Lord." If Paul speaks of a "washing with pure water," with an apparent allusion to baptism, it is the body that is to be thus washed, and not the spirit, while the "heart is sprinkled from an evil conscience" by the ministration of the "great High Priest," who comes before us in connection with this allusion, and who alone can cleanse the souls of men. And if Peter speaks of "baptism" as "saving us," he immediately connects it with "the answer of a good conscience toward God;" and that "good conscience," again, he connects with "the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Thus baptism, where it is most nearly associated with the forgiveness of sins, and the purification of the conscience, is not introduced as a seal of that forgiveness, or as, in any way, an efficacious cause of that purification. It is a figure, and not a reality. It does not work our pardon, or our cleansing. It only reminds us of Him who works them both. It is a profession of faith in him, and in his blood, and of devotion to his service who hath "loved us, and given himself for us." It is that, and, in this aspect of it, it is no more. And so, in the matter of pardon, it intrudes not between the sinner and the Saviour; and offers no contradiction to the grand cardinal announcement, that "Christ is all."

§ Baptism and regeneration.

There are certain other passages which some suppose to teach, that baptism has a certain direct influence upon the regeneration and sanctification of men. I refer here to John iii. 5. Eph. v. 16. Tit. iii. 5. But how stands the case, again, in regard to these passages? In the first of them we have those famous words of Christ, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The "kingdom of God" here is to be interpreted with reference to its existence in this world as well as in the next; as, first, the church below, and then the church above. Into the one a man cannot enter, unless he is "born of water;" unless, that is, he is baptized. Into the other

he cannot be admitted, unless he is "born of the Spirit." The one is the figure of the other, not its own complement; the birth by water; that is, representing the birth by the Spirit. That is all. Nor can it be more; unless this passage is to be set in opposition to all those other passages in which the new, the spiritual birth is ascribed to the Divine agency alone, apart from the use of all means and ordinances. In Eph. v. 26, the "washing of water" is the laver of water—the baptismal laver. But the introduction of Christ and his word in connection with this laver takes away all pretence for giving the passage a mere literal interpretation, and reduces the expression to a figurative representation of what Christ effects when he applies his cleansing word to the souls of men. A similar remark applies to "the washing of regeneration" in Tit. iii. 5. It is "the laver of regeneration;" the baptismal laver, in which men are, in a figure, born again while "born of water;" while the true regeneration is effected by the "renewing of the Holy Spirit." Thus these passages, like those which speak of baptism in connection with the remission of sins, are seen to give no sanction to the ritualism which has been falsely inferred from them; while they ascribe to Christ and his Spirit the glory which is their due in the quickening of dead souls to a new and heavenly life, and in the maintenance of that life when once imparted. So that in regeneration as in pardon, in sanctification as in justification, it is still manifest,—nor does the baptismal water in any wise contradict the momentous announcement,—that "CHRIST IS ALL!"

J. DAVIS.

Charlottetown, P. E. I.

[From the Abstinence, by request.]

Appeal to the Members of the Order of the Sons of Temperance throughout the Province of Nova Scotia.

Dear Brothers,—

For many years past the Grand Division has annually appointed a Committee to which it has delegated the important duty of providing for the dissemination of our principles through the agency of Temperance lecturers. The office of that Committee has hitherto approached much more closely to the nature of a sinecure than has been at all consistent either with the success of our Cause, or with the reputation of our Order Lecturers, have, indeed, been occasionally employed, and their addresses have invariably produced the most encouraging results; but in every instance the funds at our disposal were speedily exhausted, and our operations have amounted to little more than a series of spasmodic efforts, scarcely equal to the accomplishment of any valuable and permanent result. While nearly every little hamlet in Nova Scotia has its liquor-sellers, incessantly plying their deadly calling—while the customs of society and the solicitations of the tempter hourly surround the feet of the youthful and unwary, with snares which are too often fatal—scores of settlements throughout the Province have never heard the warning voice of the Temperance lecturer, and in many others the powerful impression which one or two lectures have produced, has gradually but surely faded away before hostile influences in constant operation.

The Agency Committee are firmly convinced that the employment of lecturers forms the most efficacious of all possible means for the extension of total abstinence principles. Every member of our Order must have read with pleasure in the columns of the Abstinence, the accounts published by Messrs. McArthur and Beattie of effects produced by their addresses. Some years ago Brother John S. Thomson, in the course of a lecturing tour round the Eastern shore of the County of Halifax, induced some hundreds of persons to take the pledge; but as few of these have ever since seen the face of an advocate of Temperance, many of them have probably returned to their old drinking customs. These and similar facts have so deeply impressed the Committee with a sense of the almost omnipotent efficiency of a permanent and wide-spread system of lecturing, that if they should be asked "When shall we be able to abolish the sale of intoxicating drinks, and arrest the progress of intemperance in Nova Scotia?" they would answer this question by another—"When will you make up your minds to meet the expense of maintaining regularly recurring lectures on Temperance in every village in Nova Scotia?"

The Committee cannot but believe that a bold attempt to carry out a project so noble, and to secure a result at once so valuable and so certain will commend itself to the sympathy and support of every true Son of Temperance.—