

Correspondence.

THE DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL.

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(Concluded.)

As a denomination we are set for the defence of the Gospel against certain forms of error that abound. We will name two or three, that especially relate to the subject of baptism.

And, first, the practice of Infant Baptism. This in its tendencies, is destructive of the doctrine of justification by faith. This doctrine is fundamental in the christian system. Faith in Christ is so simple that the child, taught by the divine Spirit may understand it, but yet it is most profound in its operations, and far reaching in its results. Without this the church has no power; she cannot even exist. "It is," as an ancient writer expresses it, "the article of a standing or falling church." Let the church lose her hold of this doctrine, and errors, the most pernicious, will take its place to the destruction of even the forms of vital godliness. Romanism grew upon the decay of a sound christian sentiment regarding this doctrine. That "master-piece of Satan," trembled in every part when Luther came forth from cloistered life, with his bible in his hand, and its precious truths in his heart to proclaim to the perishing nations the truth, well nigh forgotten, "The just shall live by faith."

Infant baptism, as it is practised, tends to the overthrow of this most important doctrine. We may be thought severe and uncharitable, since many who practice it, hold this truth as firmly as ourselves. But we state our honest conviction, deliberately formed from an observation of the fruits borne by the practice. On this principle we are as fully authorized to judge of systems as of men. Multitudes profess faith in Christ whose lives give no evidence that they have believed with the heart. Too many such are in our own churches, but there is a far greater proportion in other denominations that introduce to church membership in infancy. Such a result flows legitimately from the practice. The child is taught that it has a peculiar claim to the divine consideration, in virtue of its relationship to its parents, if perchance one or both are believers, which in many cases, after all, is exceedingly problematical. It is further taught that by baptism it has been brought into the covenant of grace, and can therefore claim God as its God. Persons thus early in life are flattered when they should be told the plague of their hearts, and warned to seek the Saviour; and the probability is, that the majority of such will be confirmed as members of the church, whose faith is less in Christ, than in their infant baptism, and church privileges,—in other words, whose religion is a cloak, in which they were invested by parental solicitude, improperly directed, and in which they were but too glad to be infolded in their maturer life; a cloak, fair perhaps in the sight of men, but in the sight of God, "as filthy rags," a cloak that poor infatuated souls fancy comes from Jesus, and in which they fondly dream of heaven, but that can never entitle its possessor to a place among the sanctified. Thus the doctrine of Justification by faith is ignored,—and another gospel introduced "which is not another;" and if the christian world would be freed from the threatened danger, the practice of infant baptism must be renounced, and there must be a return to the simple teachings of the New Testament.

Secondly.—The doctrine of baptismal regeneration. This has an intimate connection with infant baptism. It is needless to quote from a certain Prayer Book, used by a body professedly Protestant, but we cannot forbear referring to one passage, when the Priest is instructed to say immediately upon the baptism of the infant, "We receive this child into the congregation of Christ's flock," and again, "Seeing now dearly beloved brethren, that this child is regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits." "We yield thee hearty thanks most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy church." Was ever such falsehood uttered in the presence of the great God? Was there ever greater profanation of the sacred name, and of sacred things? We have reason to fear for those who hold such principles as these. Men who will not receive the truth shall have "strong delusion" sent upon them in retributive justice.

Infant baptism, wherever administered, is more or less closely related to the dogma of Baptismal Regeneration. The practice is the legitimate issue of the doctrine. Had the latter

never been accepted, the former could never have been introduced and maintained. But being introduced, it has become the strong support of the doctrine that first gave it birth. The child nourishes the parent, and receives her benediction. The two now stand united, together they must fall. True the advocates of infant baptism do not all favor the doctrine in question. By no means; many of them abhor it. But they are not in a position to utter their protest with any reasonable hope of success. They must abandon the ground they now stand upon, and harmonize example and precept, that both may bear together against the monstrous heresy. This is what Baptists are doing, or what they should do, to be true to the principles they profess. While remaining what they are, they can never adopt a theory so absurd and anti-scriptural. Their influence must ever bear against it. Let the ordinance have its proper connection with the work of the Spirit; let it follow the introduction of the soul into the life of Christ, not precede it; let it be the door through which persons, already regenerated, may enter the visible church of Christ, to enjoy the fellowship of the saints, and to labor for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, but do not let us make it the instrument of accomplishing that which the Spirit only, through the truth, can perform.

There is another error against which we have need to guard. It is similar to the last mentioned, and allied to it. I refer to the placing of baptism alongside of Repentance and Faith as the means of procuring pardon. This is an ancient error, insidious and fatal; one that has borne much bitter fruit. An examination of the writings of Justin, Clement, Tertullian and others of the early church, whom we denominate the Fathers, and who, in this instance, at least, were fathers of heresy, reveals the fact that they made the communication of saving grace, in some way dependent upon the act of baptism. Hear Origen, the first mentioned author (A. D. 139). "We received it [namely spiritual circumcision] by baptism, on account of the mercy which is from God, because we had been sinners, and it is desirable for all in like manner to receive it." Take an example from Clement of Alexandria; "Being baptized we are illuminated, being illuminated we are placed among the Gods." Or another from Tertullian, "When the soul, renewed by the second birth from water and supernal power, comes into the possession of faith, the veil of its pristine corruption is taken away, and it perceives its whole light." There is in these passages the germ of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. The language may have been intended as symbolical, but it certainly was so interpreted by readers of subsequent times. It is plain that some mysterious, mystical efficacy began early to be attributed to the ordinance. As yet faith was inculcated as a necessity also; but as the doctrine gained adherents, and baptism, or a human invention, substituted in its place, was administered to the dying and to infants, in order to place them in a state of salvation, the doctrines of justification by faith, and the second birth by the Spirit were set aside, and that of Baptismal Regeneration was boldly proclaimed, and implicitly believed. This was to be expected. He who attributes saving efficacy to the ordinances must, to be consistent adopt this theory, and more especially if he profess to have derived his opinions from the scriptures. The New Testament undoubtedly places baptism in connection with regeneration. It must either be the instrument, or means by which it is effected, or it must be intended for regenerated persons, and thus become the symbol of the new birth, the first public declaration of the new life in the soul. The latter is the view of Baptists. It is the only scriptural view; and by adherence to it, we shall be saved from the error of those who would make religion a system of forms, and carnal observances, and destitute of spiritual power. We term that *Romish* that attributes saving efficacy to the ordinances; but when we find it outside of professed Romanism, we are furnished with additional cause for heartfelt sorrow. There will be danger here so long as men have carnal hearts opposed to the humbling doctrines of the gospel. The truth on the subject of *immersion*—must prevail, at least we think so, and present indications point to that time as not very far distant; but we are greatly mistaken if, after this triumph has been achieved, there be not another danger to menace the church. It already looms up before us, with defiant aspect, and threatens to pervert the sacred ordinance, making it another Saviour,—another medium than Christ, through which divine and saving grace shall be communicated to the soul. But who, under God have the greatest power to resist this evil? Not the paedobaptist; surely not those who are already infected with the poison of the heresy. It is reserved for those who hold to the simple doctrines of the cross. Here is the ground on which to stand in the vital matter of salvation.

"He that believeth on the Son hath life," hath it the moment he believes, *hath* it as the gift of God, freely bestowed on the soul that by grace is taught to trust him. Love for Jesus is joined with faith in him; and we know that it is written "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God," and that Jesus has said "If ye love me keep my commandments." Let baptism, then, be the act of the loving soul, that cheerfully submits to every requirement of the Saviour, so far as it is understood. Let it be the text and expression of love, and not that through which the grace of salvation shall be received. Brethren ye are "set for the defence of the gospel." "Quit you like men, be strong." Prove yourselves worthy the sacred trust.

III. How shall the gospel be defended?

1. By proclaiming it. The kingdom of Christ is aggressive, it is invisible, and must endure forever. But it is not to grow by the desolating sword; its victories are all achieved by the use of spiritual weapons—weapons "not carnal, as

the apostle expresses it, "but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Jesus established his kingdom, and entrusted it to the hands of the eleven chosen disciples, by whom he would perpetuate its existence and ensure its triumphs. "So," said He "preach the gospel to every creature," assuring them that while they who use the sword shall perish by the sword, those who take their weapons from heaven's own armory, will never suffer defeat or loss. You see them going forth with God's message upon their lips. "Knowing nothing among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified;" and systems hoary with antiquity give way before them. The idols fall wherever the cross of the crucified is borne, and enemies through the power of the gospel are subdued and turned to friends. As of old the walls of Jericho fell down at the sound of the trumpet, so now the strongest walls of ignorance, superstition and error fall before the gospel proclaimed by the hosts of God's redeemed.

Speaking after the manner of men, Paul had "whereof he might glory"—but he would glory in nothing else save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was versed in classic lore and skilful in the Law—but he was "determined to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified;" and this through the divine blessing was the grand secret of his success. Well for all the gospel ministers to be like-minded with the apostle. When they preach—history—philosophy—and deal in speculative theories, when they begin to preach themselves—we may write *letabod* over the pulpit. They may have their regard in the plaudits of listening admiring multitudes, but not the honor of saving souls.

This is an age of inventions. By new appliances men endeavor to accomplish their work with greater ease and perfectness; old theories and instruments are discarded as effete and useless in the present advanced state of civilization; and the danger is that we may tire of the good old way, that, seeing so often results are not commensurate with our expectations, we shall resort to other expedients than those authorized in the word of God, and seek to prap up with human inventions what is the most secure without them; what depends for its advancement and safety, not on the arm of flesh, but on the power of God. Controversy has its advantages. Some christians are afraid of any utterance, however truthful, that may not be received kindly by others, or that may produce ill will or contention. But did not the Apostle dispute daily in Ephesus? Did not Stephen dispute with those who opposed him? And did not One greater than either declare "I came not to send peace but a sword;" and that "fr henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three?" The gospel will cause controversy. It will be opposed, and it must be defended. But when we become mere controversialists, we lose our power for good. The church must prepare herself for the battle when the cry is "no surrender," a battle that must end in victory to the one party and irretrievable disgrace and ruin to the other; but upon her weapons must be emblazoned the words uttered by angels, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men." With the "good news" of salvation on her lips she is to assail the kingdom of darkness, and by the "sword of the Spirit" she is sure to prevail. The words of a living preacher are so much to the point that we venture in this connection to repeat them.

"When I am preaching the Gospel many may say, 'Oh, he is only telling us common place truth.' Just so, I know that; and yet I feel within my self as if I was wheeling up God's great cannon, which will blow the gates of hell to pieces yet. \* \* \* This plain truth that 'God was manifest in the flesh,' is the great battering-ram against which nothing will stand. *Never lose heart in the Gospel.* Look for nothing greater, the gospel is great enough. Keep it, never think you have told men enough about it. Bleeding martyrs in their graves call you to be faithful confessors who ascended to heaven in fleshy chariots implore you to be steadfast. 'Hell is that ye have received?' Attempt not to amend the truth, venture not to shape it to the fancy of the times, but proclaim it in all its naked purity. By this manner the gods of Rome and Greece were dashed to shivers, by this lever the world was turned upside down; it is this which has filled heaven with redeemed souls, and made hell to tremble in its palace of fire. Think it about your heart, and dry the hosts of Rome or hell to molten lead. Weep it about your loins in death, and hold it as a staff in your hand in life. This simple truth Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost; and that 'whoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life,' these must be your feet, your treasure, your life."

Thus speaks one whom God has highly honored in the conversion of souls. Men may speculate as they please, concerning the secret of Spurgeon's success; but after all he gives us, in his own words the only satisfactory solution of the problem.

But the whole truth must be joined with the gospel announcement of salvation, through Jesus Christ. All the great truths that relate to Christ, and to his work must be proclaimed, and the ordinances of the gospel faithfully taught. Multitudes adopt sprinkling as baptism, who sincerely strive to do the will of the Lord. Through the influence of early training and prejudice they have been blinded to the truth and, by the sophistries of false teaching, confirmed in error. It becomes, therefore, our duty to unfold the teachings of the New Testament, and to show distinctly the order of God's house. Let men be offended if they will; that is their concern not ours—but they nevertheless demand of us that we be faithful, and instruct them truly. False theories are being constantly propounded, and thrust upon the people, and will be accepted by them, unless the truth be duly enforced;—for "how shall they hear without a preacher?" If we have the light, we do wrong to conceal it. Some tell us we undervalue the ordinances because, forsooth, we attribute to

them no mystical efficacy in saving souls. Let us show that we do value the rituals that Christ has ordained; not from a craven selfish desire of being saved by them, but because we have the love of Christ in our hearts; the love that impels and animates us in his service; the love that constrains to a cheerful observance of all that he commands. While ever ready to protest against the undue exaltation of the ordinances, let us beware of the opposite extreme—lest we give comfort to those who slight and despise them. Let us teach those who err, the better way. Let us, so far as lieth in us, have no ground for excuse on the part of those who seek to please the Saviour, if they fail to comply with all the commands of the gospel.

2. We defend the Gospel when we suffer for it.

Nothing has ever been accomplished for the good of man without painful effort. The world's benefactors, in whatever sphere they may have labored, have been compelled to suffer in their work, and, in most cases, even at the hands of those whose good they sought. This is emphatically true of those who have striven for the spiritual welfare of their fellow men. From Abel downwards there is a long line of witnesses to attest this fact. "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Through suffering they procured for an unworthy race a priceless heritage.

Christianity is aggressive but never vindictive. It resents not an injury; reviles not when reviled. If smitten on the one cheek, it turns the other rather than resist. "The blood of the murdered Abel cried unto the Lord from the ground." From the dungeon, where holy men have laid them down to die; from the arena where wild beasts devoured, and from the stake where the flames consumed them, one long pleading cry has gone up to heaven, not for vengeance, but for mercy on the guilty world. Holy martyrs in the hour of death, prayed for their murderers, that they might be subdued by the power of the cross, and their souls saved from hell. With Stephen they cried "Lord lay not this sin to their charge;" and thus proved themselves worthy followers of Him who said "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." There is what calls itself by the name of religion; that courts the world's smile and patronage; that will not be singular, or at variance with its maxims, but rather uses its acts for the sake of its friendships; but it is not the religion of Christ; it is a base counterfeit. The religion is sternly uncompromising, and can never be in fashion with the world. "If I yet pleased men," said an apostle, "I should not be a servant of Christ." Opposition will be aroused but in suffering patiently when the world frowns, and persecutes, it has the assurance of ultimate victory. Jesus said to his disciples "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world." Would you know how He overcame? See then and follow him in his life on earth, see him at Pilate's bar, and on Calvary's cross. Behold him in agony working out the problem of human salvation, and learn how you too may come off "more than conquerors." Brethren, if we are set for the defence of the gospel we must suffer—how, I cannot say, but the fact itself is certain. If we would overcome, and win laurels for the Master, we must patiently endure. We must be willing to be despised and hated—to have our name cast out as evil, because of our allegiance to Christ. To all such the Saviour says, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."

3. We must defend the gospel by the power of a holy life.

We must on this point, necessarily, be brief, and yet the subject demands our most earnest and devout consideration. Whatever attainments we may make in knowledge, however sound we may be in our doctrinal views, or correct in respect to the ordinances of God's house, all, without the life of godliness, avails us nothing. We shall be judged, not by our words, but by our lives. If unworthy conduct on the part of professing christians had no other effect than the weakening of their own influence for good, there would be sufficient cause for regret. But how much more so when such by their inconsistent lives, put the stumbling-block in the way of the unconverted, dishonor the name of Jesus, and place the most effective weapons in the hands of the adversaries of the gospel, who boldly employ them to the ruin of immortal souls. And truly we know of nothing that will more effectually hinder a man's power for good, or tend so effectually to confirm the impenitent in a life of sin than the want of a due correspondence between the profession and the life. Here we find the greatest hindrance to the success of the gospel. Men judge of the tree by the fruit it bears; and they learn to despise religion because they meet with so many "who have the form of godliness," but who are "dead in trespasses and sins." Let christians separate themselves from the world; let them show what divine grace has done for them—how it has destroyed the love of sin, and imparted a longing for holiness—let them be "known and read of all men as the epistles of Christ," having the law written upon their hearts, and we may expect results beyond all that we as yet know any thing of. We should no longer be compelled, to mourn, as we do at our annual gatherings, over our small measures of success in winning souls to Jesus—God's blessing would attend our efforts. We should see the churches strengthened; their young men consecrating themselves for service at home and abroad, and their contributions flowing into the treasury of the Lord. The Word would "have free course," and the kingdom of Jesus every where triumphant and glorious.