

## WHY FREE BAPTISTS ARE OPEN COMMUNISTS.

A PAPER READ AT THE MINISTERS' CONFERENCE BY REV. G. W. FOSTER.

Neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

Free Baptists are open Communists, because—

1. Communion with all saints tends to union, the strength and beauty of the Church. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Union among Christians disarms Satan of his deadliest weapons, silences a gainsaying world and contains them to acknowledge the divine origin of the religion of Christ. The more his disciples of every name are united in feeling and action, the sooner will ignorance, superstition and vice be subdued, and the nations converted. The prayer of Jesus will receive an accomplishment. They will be all one then, not necessarily in name, but in heart. They will be one in Heaven. In that blessed realm there will be no uncharitable restrictions, no exclusiveness, no separating walls. If these will be unknown in Heaven, why should they exist here?

It must be apparent to every careful observer that one great separating wall still divides the acknowledged disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; viz., close communion, a wall not erected by Divine authority but by man, and tending to cherish intolerance, bigotry and pride, one of the remnants of a narrow superstition which must fall before increasing light and love.

2. Because this ordinance, so significant of the atonement, was designed for perpetual and universal observance in the church. It was designed for all Christians, because it was to be observed in remembrance of Christ, in whom they all, alike, have a personal interest. This is evident from the following Scriptures Matt. 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-26, Luke 22:17-20, I Corin. 11:23-30.

3. Because the assumption that baptism is required as an indispensable prerequisite to admission to the Lord's supper, and the practice of refusing it to all whom they regarded as unbaptized is unauthorized by the Scriptures, and the result of numerous gross errors and corruptions which found their way into the church during the first four centuries of the Christian era. A. "Thus saith the Lord," that baptism is an essential condition to communion cannot be found in the Scriptures. The sacrament of the Lord's is a positive institution, wholly dependent on the authority of Christ. His will being the measure of our duty in relation to it, the precept requiring its observance is a positive one not gathered by implication or inference. But there is no precept that baptism and the Lord's Supper are inseparably connected, or that the former is an indispensable prerequisite to the privileges of the latter. There is no more reason to conclude, from any passage contained in the Bible, that baptism is an indispensable prerequisite to the communion, than that it is an indispensable prerequisite to prayer.

4. Because close communion cannot be sustained by circumstantial evidence. The first evidence usually employed relates to the order of time in which the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted. It has been asserted that baptism had the priority. No proof can be found. There is no evidence that every one of the disciples had received Christian baptism previous to the memorable night in which the Saviour administered to them the emblems of his body and blood. Again, Christian baptism was not instituted until after the institution of the Lord's Supper. The rite administered by John and the disciples of Christ, previous to the communion given them (Matt. 28:19) and before the Holy Ghost was given, is not to be regarded as Christian baptism, nor the same as the ordinance instituted by Christ (Matt. 28:19). It was merely an introductory rite, designed to prepare the way for the Gospel dispensation; and in this we agree not only with the ancient church but with the most respectable writers, Baptist and Pedobaptist of the present day. Christian baptism originated in the express command of Christ, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." No such origin can be claimed for the baptism of John, who baptized for some time before he knew Christ (John 1:31). He ascribes his commission to the Father (John 1:33). The baptism of John, unlike Christian

baptism, was not administered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Some whom John baptized had not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost (Acts 19:2). Some of those who received John's baptism were afterwards baptized by the Apostles. This was the case with certain disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus (Acts 19:5), and in all probability with many others. For these reasons we think it clear that John's baptism was not Christian baptism but rather an introductory rite intended to prepare the way for the coming Messiah and his kingdom. The reasons for believing that the rite performed by John was not Christian baptism will apply with equal force to that performed by the disciples of Jesus, previous to his ascension. If as the Rev. Robert Hall (Baptist) maintains, the Jewish dispensation continued in force till the death of Christ; if Christian baptism originated in the express command of Christ (Matt. 28:19), if the baptism which the disciples of our Lord performed was not administered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but was merely a preparatory and initiatory rite into the Gospel dispensation, then, equally with John's baptism it cannot be recognized as Christian baptism. Unless this whole argument is unsound, Christian baptism was not instituted prior to the communion. It follows, of necessity, that if Jesus administered the sacrament to his disciples, when as yet they had not received Christian baptism, then Christian baptism is not an indispensable prerequisite to communion. The second evidence relied upon by the advocates of close communion, is "the order of words in that commission given to the ambassadors of Christ," "Go ye therefore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; 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," (Matt. 28:19-20). This commission is no warrant for the practice of close communion; it says nothing about the Lord's Supper, and was not given until after this ordinance had been instituted and administered. The passage might be properly adduced to show that all baptized believers are required to observe the sacramental service; but it proves no inseparable connection or dependence of one Gospel ordinance upon another. The third evidence supposed to authorize close communion is the order of administration in the primitive and Apostolic practice. In order for this to avail anything it must be shown that the Apostles and their associates never received an unbaptized person to the communion. This cannot be done. We freely admit that it was the general practice in the Apostolic and primitive churches to baptize persons before admitting them to the communion; baptism was considered essential to Salvation; baptism was the visible sign of a profession of faith in Christ, and was required as such of every believer. In those churches there could be no mistake on the subject of baptism, for the Apostles knew what the claims of that ordinance were and how it ought to be administered. Under these circumstances a person refusing to be baptized could not have been admitted to the communion for the reason that he knowingly and willfully rejected one of the ordinances, and therefore showed that he was not a true believer. He would have been denied admission to the Lord's table, not on the ground that baptism is an indispensable condition to communion, but because, by refusing to be baptized, under the circumstances in which he was placed, he showed that he did not possess a Christian character. That is not the case now. The Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians generally refuse to submit to what we (the Baptists) consider Christian baptism, but their refusal does not destroy their evidence of Christian character. To refuse to commune with Methodists, Congregationalists etc., on the ground of the Apostolic precedent, is to declare to the world that they are not Christians. The truth is, that the Apostolic precedent does not authorize close communion, but the contrary. No sane man will deny, but there are multitudes of as enlightened, conscientious and devoted Christians in the denominations mentioned as any on earth. Must we exclude them from the communion because the Apostles excluded the willfully obstinate and disobedient? The Spirit of the Apostolic precedent, admitting it to be what it is claimed to have been, is clearly this—to receive to the communion those, and those only, who exhibited proper evidence of Christian character. If, therefore, we would proceed according to the spirit of that precedent, we must admit to the communion all who exhibit proper evidence of true piety. To

make the statement as clear as we can under the administration of the Apostles, there could be no mistake about baptism, and those who neglected it could not be recognized as Christians, and therefore were refused admission to the table of the Lord, but at the present day persons may be honestly mistaken on the subject of baptism. Having received what they conscientiously believe to be baptism, they may refuse to submit to the real ordinance, and yet be true Christians and therefore entitled to the privilege of commemorating the Saviour's dying love at his table.

5. Again, Free Baptists are open Communists because it does not follow, while there are different churches and denominations, arising out of difference in doctrinal views, that they must refuse to unite with each other in the communion service. The table is the Lord's not theirs, and they are invited to it, to commemorate the sufferings of Christ, not to cherish a sectarian spirit. Free Baptists believe that the ordinance was designed for the benefit of all the children of God, and that no part of them can assume the control of it, and exclude the rest from its participations. They further believe that it is not inconsistent for a church to refuse membership to one of different sentiments, and yet permit him to unite with them in the communion service. They deny him membership with them on the ground of his difference of doctrinal views from theirs, they allow him to unite with them in the communion service on the ground of his personal interest in the atonement of Christ. No injury is done to the individual, for if he cannot obtain membership in the particular church in question, he can in some other with whose doctrinal views his own accord. One of the following courses must be pursued by churches of different denominations: (1) to commune with each other members, (2) to deny that the communion was designed for all evangelical Christians, (3) to deny that any of those with whom they will not commune are Evangelical Christians.

6. Free Baptists are Open Communists, because close communion is repugnant to the principles on which the Lord's Supper was instituted, and the object for which it was designed. The object contemplated in the institution of this ordinance was, unquestionably, to preserve in the church, down to the latest period of time, a lively remembrance of the Saviour's meritorious offering. "As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." Close Communion would exclude a large number of acknowledged Christians from the privileges and benefits of this important ordinance. It builds up a separating wall which Christ and the Apostles never required but expressly forbade.

7. Because close communion is unscriptural. Many passages might be quoted to establish this position, but we choose to confine ourselves to one which forbids schism among the members of Christ's body. The body of Christ which is the church is one, and every true believer is a member of that body. The Apostolic language on this subject is so much in point that we quote the passage at length, "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say because I am not of the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not of the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay much more these members of the body which seem to be feeble are necessary: And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need, but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part that lacked. That there should be no schism [margin division] in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of

Christ and members in particular (1 Corin. 12:12-17). If Paul had been discussing the question of close communion he could hardly have employed a better argument, or chosen a more appropriate illustration. The general principle laid down in the passage is precisely applicable to the case in hand. With the view here presented of the relation which all true believers sustain to each other, we ask, with him, "Is Christ divided? (1 Corin. 1:13.) Either our pedo-baptist brethren are members of Christ's body, or they are not. If they are, then can they lawfully be divided from the other members of that body? Close communion is a schism, a division in the body of Christ. When an ordinance is celebrated in commemoration of the living Head, designed for the nourishment of the whole body shall one member say to the others, I have no need of you?

8. Because Free Communion is Scriptural. Christ designed the ordinance for the benefit of all His followers. At the time of instituting it he said, "Drink ye all of it. (Matt. 26:27). That this command was not restricted to the disciples then present, but applied to all who should succeed them, is evident from (1 Corin. 11:26), "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." Again the ordinance was designed for all who are in the fold of Christ—all the members of his general church and not of any visible local organization exclusively. Christ has expressly taught us that all who are in Him are in his fold, the general church. "Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you I am the door of the sheep; I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in, and out, and find pasture. (John 10:7-9). The advocates of close communion are willing to admit that many pedo-baptists are real Christians. If they are real Christians, they are in the number of God's children, and have a right to sit at their Father's table. If they are real Christians, they have spiritual communion with Christ and his people, and ought to be permitted to have visible communion. God communes with them if they are real Christians, and why should any of the professing people of God be more strict in their communion, than he is? If pedo-baptists are real Christians, they are among those who feed upon Christ by faith. Should they not be permitted to feed upon the appointed emblems of his body and blood? They are partakers really and spiritually; should they not be sacramentally? If pedo-baptists are real Christians, they are heirs of heaven, and will shortly be received to Heaven; should it be made more difficult to obtain a seat at the sacramental table on earth, than to procure admission to the marriage supper of the Lamb above? Heaven is certainly the great object and end of the Christian pilgrimage, and earthly ordinances are but the means of obtaining it. Should it be made more difficult to secure the means than the end? Should the Lord's table be barred against the approach of those, to whom the gate of Heaven is open?

9. Because the principle maintained in the Apostles' doctrine, authorizes free communion. Peter once supposed the blessings of the Gospel to be confined to one people, but a voice from heaven declared to him, "What God hath cleansed that call not, thou common" (Acts 10:15.) Afterwards the Apostle boldly proclaimed, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him. (Acts 10:34-35.) If then persons have been cleansed of God, and are accepted of him shall we regard them as too common to be admitted to the sacramental table? Says Paul, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). 10. Because the Scriptural requirements of forbearance are favorable to free communion, as they exhibit both the doctrine and practice of the Apostles in circumstances analogous to the one under consideration. Paul treats this subject at large in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of Romans. On this passage we cannot refrain from giving comments of that clear, forcible writer, and devoted Christian, Robert Hall. "How refreshing it is to turn from these rigid and repulsive principles (of close communion) to the contemplation of the generous maxims of the New Testament. 'Him that is weak in the faith, says Paul (Rom. 14:1) receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations, and after illustrating his meaning by adducing examples of various diversities of sentiment amongst his converts, he proceeds to inculcate the most perfect mutual toleration. It is observable that the difference of opinion which he specifies relative to the obligation of certain positive in-

stitutes, to which, though abrogated by the new dispensation, a part of the church adhered, while its more enlightened members understood, and embraced the liberty with which Christ had made them free. 'We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.' A moment's attention to the connexion will convince, that the term weak in both passages, denotes persons whose conceptions are erroneous, for the inspired writer is not adverting to the different degrees of conviction with which the same truths are embraced, but to a palpable difference of judgment. Thus far the case here decided is precisely similar to that under present discussion. Our difference from the pedo-baptists turns on the nature and obligation of a positive institute. The error of which Paul enjoined the toleration, consisted in adhering to ceremonies which had been abrogated, the error with which we are concerned, consists in mistaking a ceremony which is still in force. It behooves us to examine the principle on which the Apostle enjoins toleration, and if this is applicable in its full extent to the case of our pedo-baptist brethren no room is left for doubt. The principle plainly is, that the error in question was not of such magnitude as to preclude him who maintained it from the favor of God. 'Let not him who eateth despise him who eateth not; and let not him who eateth not judge him who eateth; for God hath received him. Who art thou, that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea he shall be holden up; for Christ is able to hold him up.' If such is the reason assigned for mutual toleration, and it is acknowledged to be a sufficient one which none can deny without impeaching the inspiration of the writer, it is as conclusive respecting the obligation of tolerating every error which is consistent with a state of Salvation, as if that error had been mentioned by name; and as few, if any doubt the piety of many pedo-baptists, it not only justifies the reception, but renders it an indispensable duty. Nothing can be more futile than the attempt to turn aside the edge of this reasoning, by remarking there is no mention of baptism, and that this is not the subject of which Paul is treating, as though the Bible, contained no general principles, no maxims of universal application, but that precise directions must be found for every possible emergency that in the lapse of ages may occur. The Bible gives general rules of action, broad principles, leaving them to be applied under the guidance of sound discretion; and wherever it has decided a doubtful question accompanied with and express statement of the principle on which the decision is founded, such explanation has all the force of an Apostolic canon, by which we are bound to regulate our conduct in all the variety of cases to which it applies. Hence we have only one alternative, either to deny that those who differ from us on the subject of baptism are accepted of God, or to receive them into fellowship (that is into the communion service) on exactly the same ground and on the same principle, that Paul enjoined the toleration of sincere Christians."

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