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INFANT BAPTISM;

OR,

HATH THIS CHILD BEEN ALREADY
BAPTIZED?



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INFANT BAPTISM,

&c.

PART I.

Clergyman. Well, John, I am glad to see your wife looking so well, after all that she has gone through. I hope that, by God's mercy, she will soon be strong enough to come to church: and then your little one can be baptized.

John. Thank you, Sir; my wife has done very well, thank God. But I do not know that we shall bring the child to church. I don't hold much by Baptism myself. Indeed, to tell you the truth, I was very glad when the registration was brought in, and did away with Baptism altogether.

Clergyman. I do not think you can mean quite what you say, John. How do you think registration did away with Baptism?

John. Why, Sir, I mean that it's all one now, whether a child is baptized or not; because if you want to get his certificate, and to know all about him, you can get it from the office.

Clergyman. Yes; it's all one for this world,

John. But what do you think about the next world ?

John. Why, there now, Sir, I never could see what difference Baptism can make for the next world.

Clergyman. I don't agree with you in that, John, but I should like to know what makes you think so.

John. Doesn't it stand to reason, Sir ? What difference can it make in the sight of God, whether a child has a few drops of water poured upon it or not ?

Clergyman. You see, John, we must look to the Bible to learn about these things. If the Bible tells us that it does make a difference, we may be sure that it is so. You know that God often chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty ¹.

John. Quite true, Sir. But the Bible never goes against our reason. And there's something in all this about Baptism, that seems to go straight against my reason.

Clergyman. I do not think you would say that, John, if you were to look at it in another way. It may be *above* your reason : but I cannot think that it is *against* it. You remember the history of Naaman the Syrian. He went to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy. The prophet sent him a message, which was : "Go, and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean ²."

¹ 1 Cor. i. 27.

² 2 Kings v. 10



John. Oh yes. But that was a type of our washing in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Clergyman. Well; be that as it may, it does not touch the particular point I mean. What I say is this. The prophet required—or rather God Himself required—of Naaman an outward act of simple faith and obedience, which could not of itself do him any good. Naaman had expected a cure in a very different way. He was offended at the command. He complained that it was contrary to reason: and “so he turned and went away in a rage.” But when he was persuaded to perform that act of obedience, he was healed at once. It was not the mere washing in Jordan that cured him; but yet, if he had not washed in that river, he would have continued a leper. You see, God required of Naaman an outward act of obedience, and the blessing went with it. Now suppose that, in the same way, God should require of us an outward act of simple obedience, in order to obtain a blessing: is that against reason?

John. I don't know that it is. But the Bible tells me that what is required of us is to believe. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ³.”

Clergyman. Quite true, John. But you will see in the Bible, too, that an outward act is often joined with the inward act of believing; as for instance in Romans x. 10. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the

³ Acts xvi. 31.

mouth confession is made unto salvation." This confession with the mouth is an outward act.

John. Yes; but it had nothing to do with Baptism.

Clergyman. Perhaps not; but I think it very likely that when St. Paul used the words, he was thinking of the confession of faith which was required in Baptism. At any rate, there can be no doubt about our Lord's own words, when He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved⁴."

John. I know that the Bible often speaks of the Baptism of the Spirit.

Clergyman. Yes, John: but it often speaks of the Baptism of water also. You cannot doubt that our Lord speaks of the Baptism of water in the passage which I have just quoted. St. Matthew gives the account of the institution of Baptism more fully. He says in chap. xxviii. 19, that our Lord told His Apostles to "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Now this means, rather, as you will see in the margin of a reference Bible, "make disciples of all nations," "baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In the original language the words can scarcely mean anything but this—that the Apostles were to make converts from all nations, to receive them into the number of Christians or disci-

⁴ Mark xvi. 16.

ples of our Lord, and to baptize them at the time of receiving them.

John. Well, but they must repent and believe first.

Clergyman. Certainly; but what I gather from Scripture is, that they must be baptized also. I see that through the Acts of the Apostles, Baptism is put as the next step to repentance and faith. When the multitude asked Peter on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do?" his answer was, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ⁵." When St. Paul describes the circumstances attending his conversion, he says that the command which Ananias brought him from the Lord was "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the Name of the Lord ⁶." And we see the same in almost every case of conversion that is described to us, as for instance in the case of the Eunuch of Ethiopia ⁷, in that of Cornelius ⁸, that of Lydia ⁹, that of the jailor of Philippi ¹, and that of the disciples who had been already baptized with John's Baptism ². Now I think that all these passages are enough to prove that Baptism is required. And if God requires it of us, we ought to obey.

John. Well, Sir, I think so too. But after

⁵ Acts ii. 38.

⁷ Acts viii. 36—38.

⁹ Acts xvi. 15.

⁶ Acts xxii. 16.

⁸ Acts x. 47, 48.

¹ Acts xvi. 33.

² Acts xix. 5.

all, it can only be a sign. It cannot touch the heart.

Clergyman. When Naaman was ordered to wash in the river Jordan, his washing in that river was in one sense a sign. But the virtue went with the sign. The moment he washed he was made whole. And I think that Scripture seems to say as much about Baptism.

John. What do you mean that it says, Sir?

Clergyman. I mean, that it seems to say, that there is a blessing which goes along with Baptism, and that it is not a mere sign. Look at the first place where our Blessed Lord speaks of it, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God³." You see that the birth of water and of the Spirit are put together. I do not think that the birth of water can be understood of any thing but Baptism. And if so, the birth of the Spirit is connected with our Baptism.

John. Well, I don't know, Sir: I've heard people say, that means being born of the Holy Spirit acting as water in cleansing the heart.

Clergyman. Do you yourself think, John, that this can be the meaning of our Saviour's words? If our Lord had never instituted Baptism by water, then the expression would have been difficult to understand, and we might have been driven to some such explanation as you mention. But as you believe Jesus Christ to have

³ John iii. 5.

ordained the Sacrament of Baptism, which do you yourself think is most simple and natural—that by “water and the Spirit” should be meant the outward element and the inward grace, or that by “water and the Spirit” should be meant only the Spirit cleansing like water?

John. I never much liked that way of explaining it.

Clergyman. No wonder, John. It must have seemed to you too much like a way of getting rid of the passage. I believe that when our Saviour spoke of the new birth of water and of the Holy Spirit, He meant that there was a real connexion between our Baptism and the birth of the Spirit.

John. Still that seems to me to be contrary to other passages of Scripture. Doesn't it say, “Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not⁴?” Yet I am sure that thousands of people who have been baptized, have lived and died in sin.

Clergyman. It is too true, John. The ungodly lives of baptized men have been, and always will be, the greatest stumbling-block to others. But you will remember that St. Paul speaks of Christians as “dead unto sin” (which is very like what St. John says) in a passage in which he also expressly connects Baptism with the new birth to righteousness. I mean in Romans vi. 2—7. “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are

⁴ 1 John v. 18.

buried with Him by Baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." It seems to me, that both the Apostles are speaking of the after life of a baptized person, who leads the rest of his life according to that beginning, so that the grace of God in his soul has its perfect work. But with many people (indeed with most people) who are baptized, this is not the case. St. Paul himself seemed to foresee this, when he warned us in 1 Cor. x. 1—12, that we must take care lest our condition be like that of the Israelites of old, who came out of Egypt. "All of them," he says, "were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; . . . but with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness." Indeed, of those who came out of Egypt, all from twenty years old and upward, save only Caleb and Joshua, were consumed in the wilderness, and died there⁵. None of the number, except two, ever entered the land of promise.

John. Well, then, I cannot see the use of Baptism at all.

Clergyman. Even if we could not see the use

⁵ Num. xiv. 29—32

of it, it ought to be enough for us to know that God requires it. A Jew might have said that he did not see the use of circumcision; but every man that was uncircumcised was to be "cut off from his people ⁶." However, I have put before you one passage which does show the use of Baptism. Our blessed Saviour connects it with the birth of the Spirit. St. Paul, too, speaks of it as "the washing of regeneration ⁷" (or of the new birth), and he says that "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word ⁸." St. Peter also, after speaking of Noah and his family as having been saved by water, in the ark, adds, "The like figure whereunto even Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ⁹."

John. Well, Sir, there seems to be more in the matter than I thought for. But I should like to ask you one question. Do you mean to say, that every person who is not baptized, is shut out from Heaven, even if he is a believer?

Clergyman. People have often asked me that question before. And I generally give the same answer; I say that I understand a 'believer' to be one who believes all that the Bible teaches. And I cannot imagine a person being a believer in this sense, without believing the duty and the necessity of Baptism. But if there be

⁶ Gen. xvii. 14.

⁸ Eph. v. 26.

⁷ Tit. iii. 5.

⁹ 1 Pet. iii. 21.

such a person, I will answer your question about him, when I have found a passage in the Bible which tells me what will be the future condition of him who believeth, and is not baptized. So with regard to the unbaptized children of Christian parents. If you can show me a passage of Scripture which makes the point clear, how God will deal with them hereafter, I will then answer the question. As it is, I am content to know that in their case, as well as in all others, the Judge of all the earth will do right¹. But what I do say is this,—I would not for the world leave my own child unbaptized; it seems to me to be going against God's commandment. It is true that God's mercy is not tied to outward ordinances; His own words are, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy²." But though God is not tied to outward ordinances, man is. If He has promised a blessing to those who seek it in one way, we may be quite sure that we shall have that blessing for ourselves and for our children, if we seek it in that way. But we cannot be sure of it; nay, we cannot expect it, if we do not seek it in God's own way. God may give it, or may withhold it, as it seemeth Him good; but we have nothing to do with this. It is better to be on the safe side. And the safe side is that of humble obedience to all that we can learn of the will of God. I am sure that if it should

¹ Gen. xviii. 25.

² Exod. xxxiii. 19.

please God to take your child, you would feel much more happy about it, if you knew that you had brought it to Him, and dedicated it to Him in Baptism.

PART II.

John. I am glad to see you again, Sir, because I wish to have some more talk with you about Baptism. I have thought a good deal more about it since my child was born: and I have read some books that my brother Thomas lent me. And, to tell you the truth, Sir, I don't see my way clear to having my child baptized. It seems to me that there is nothing in the Bible about children being baptized.

Clergyman. Well, John, I shall be very happy to talk that matter over with you. Your brother Thomas calls himself a Baptist, doesn't he?

John. Yes: I believe he does, Sir. At least I know that the people he belongs to are all against having children baptized.

Clergyman. Well now, can you remember any thing that his books say against baptizing infants?

John. Oh yes, Sir; they say that there is no command in the Bible to baptize infants, and that we never read of any one being baptized except grown-up people; and that our Saviour was thirty years old when He was baptized; and that our Lord says no one ought to be baptized till he is a believer, which a child cannot be.

Clergyman. Well, then, we will take each of these points in order, and try what we can find out about them. You say first that there is no command in the Bible to baptize infants.

John. That is the first thing.

Clergyman. Well, at any rate, John, you will admit that the Bible does not forbid us to baptize infants. And I think that this is a very important point. I will tell you why. Before our Saviour instituted Christian Baptism, there was another sort of Baptism among the Jews. Whenever a Gentile became a convert, or proselyte, as it was called, the Jews used to baptize him. Now the custom was that if a proselyte had any infant children, these children also, if their father desired it, were baptized and made proselytes with him³.

John. Oh, but that was not like Christian Baptism.

Clergyman. No, it was not. But what I say is, that the Apostles would naturally follow the same practice with regard to the children and families of Christian converts. They would naturally baptize the children as well as the parents, if they had no command to the contrary. And it seems most likely, that if our Lord had intended that Christian Baptism should be confined to adults, He would have warned His disciples against following the former practice of baptizing children also. Do you understand what I mean?

³ See Wall on Infant Baptism. Introduction.

John. Yes, I think I do. But I never heard of the Jews baptizing; I always thought that it was a new thing.

Clergyman. In one way it was a new thing. Our Lord adopted several things which He found existing among the Jews. But in adopting them He gave them a new meaning, and a new use. Only the practice still remained. And if He had desired that in the case of Baptism the old practice should be altered in the matter of baptizing infants, it seems to me most likely that He would have expressly mentioned it.

John. Well, but is there any example in the Bible of children being baptized? My brother declares that there is not.

Clergyman. No one can say for certain whether there is, or whether there is not. We are told in Acts xvi. that Lydia was baptized, and her household; and in the same chapter, that the jailor of Philippi was baptized, "he and all his straightway." Can any one venture to say that there were no children in the household of either of these converts? The point must be left doubtful, at the very least. But I fully admit that the other instances recorded are instances of adult Baptism. I do not see how we could expect it to be otherwise, when the Gospel was first preached.

John. Yes, and our blessed Lord was certainly baptized as an adult.

Clergyman. Quite true. In His case it could not have been otherwise. John never began to

baptize until our Saviour was grown up. But besides this, John's Baptism was so entirely different from Christian Baptism, that I do not see how we can argue with any certainty from one to the other. You remember that we are told in Acts xix. that some disciples who had been baptized with John's Baptism were baptized again in the Name of the Lord Jesus. This proves that the Baptism of John was a different thing from Christian Baptism. For these two reasons, it appears to me that the case of our blessed Saviour does not touch the question of infant Baptism amongst Christians. But you seemed to think that the very words in which our Lord instituted Baptism implied that infants should not be baptized, because they cannot believe.

John. It looks like it. Our Lord said "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Does not this mean that a man must believe before he is baptized? Our Lord puts believing first. What my brother says is, that a child cannot believe, and therefore it is not fit to be baptized.

Clergyman. Do you remember what our Lord says next? He says "He that believeth not shall be damned." But I am sure your brother would not apply this to children. He would never say, "A child cannot believe, and therefore a child is not fit to be saved." Yet if he applies one part of the text to children, he ought to apply the other part as well to children. The fact is, that neither part of this

passage can be applied to children. Our Lord was speaking of those to whom the Gospel would be preached—grown-up men and women—or at least persons who had come to years of discretion. He does not say what should be done with the children of those who believed and were baptized themselves. And therefore this text leaves the case of children just where it was before. It leaves it untouched. Do you see what I mean?

John. It seems to me quite clear that our Lord could not have been speaking of children when He said “He that believeth not shall be damned.”

Clergyman. He was speaking, you think, of grown persons, and of grown persons only?

John. Yes, exactly.

Clergyman. Then do not you think that He must have been speaking of grown persons, and of grown persons only, in the other part of the text also?

John. I suppose that He must.

Clergyman. It certainly seems to me that He must be considered to speak of the same persons throughout the text. We cannot explain the two parts of two different classes. And as we cannot apply both parts to the case of infants, we must not apply either of them to it. In fact, this text does not touch the point. But the great question is, in what sense the Apostles themselves understood the Saviour’s command, and how they acted upon it. I am quite sure of this, that if to baptize

children had been inconsistent with that command, the Apostles would not have baptized them. Yet I think that I see in the Bible itself a proof that the Apostles did so ; and this appears to me one of the strongest arguments in favour of the practice.

John. Well, I should like to hear how that is proved.

Clergyman. Why, John, if the children of those who were converted and baptized, had not been baptized as well as their parents ; there would have been two different classes of people in the congregations to which St. Paul wrote. There would have been the baptized Christian parents : and their unbaptized children. Now do you not think that St. Paul would have addressed a few words to these unbaptized children ? That he would have exhorted them to follow the faith of their parents, and to receive the Gospel into their hearts, so that they might be baptized and made members of Christ ? Do not you think he would naturally have said something of this kind to them ?

John. Certainly, I think he would. But then he does address children.

Clergyman. Yes, and this is the very point I think so important. He does address children. But does he address them as if they were in a different position from their parents and the members of the Church, as they would be, if the rest were baptized and the children were unbaptized ? Just look at the passages in which

St. Paul addresses children. You will find one in Ephesians, chapters v. vi. You will see that he exhorts wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, masters, each in their turn, putting no difference between them, as if the children were unbaptized, and the rest baptized. And observe what he says to the children,—“Children, obey your parents in the Lord.” The words “in the Lord” seem to express the motive to which St. Paul appeals as the ground of this obedience: namely, that the children were themselves members of Christ, and, as such, were bound to perform this duty. Would he have spoken thus to any but those who had been “baptized into Christ,” and so had “put on Christ.”⁴?

There is another passage in the Epistle to the Colossians, chapters iii. iv. St. Paul in the third chapter speaks evidently to baptized Christians. In the first verse he says, “If ye be risen with Christ;” alluding to the twentieth verse of the last chapter, where he speaks of their being “dead with Christ.” And these expressions are only used of baptized Christians⁵. Then he goes on to say in verses 9, 10, “Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him,” reminding us of Galatians iii. 27: “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” It is clear therefore that he is

⁴ Gal. iii. 27.

⁵ Rom. vi. 3. 8.

addressing people who were “baptized Christians.” Well now, St. Paul goes on to speak to the separate classes of people who were included under this one head. And what are these classes? You will see wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, masters. Can we suppose that the children who are thus mixed up with baptized adults, were still unbaptized, and therefore had neither part nor lot in the matter?

John. Why no, certainly they must have been all alike.

Clergyman. There seems to me to be no question of it. And what I gather from this is, that the Apostles themselves baptized the children of those who embraced the Gospel, or at least allowed them to be baptized. And if the Apostles did so, I suppose that we cannot be wrong in doing the same.

John. No, I am quite sure that the Apostles were right in whatever they did.

Clergyman. Yes; we cannot doubt this. You remember that when our Saviour was about to leave His Apostles He promised to send them His Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Now we know that this promise was fulfilled, and the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost. Can we suppose for a moment that the Holy Spirit left them in error upon such an important point as infant Baptism?

John. I should never think so, Sir. If the Apostles approved of the Baptism of children, it must be right; and from what you have said,

there seems to be good reason to think that they did.

Clergyman. We know this too, John; that the practice of infant Baptism was considered in very early times to have the sanction of the Apostles' authority. And, certainly, from the first ages, as far as we can trace it back, it has been the custom of the whole Church of Christ. This fact, in itself, is to my mind, quite reason enough for retaining infant Baptism. For can we suppose that the whole Church has been allowed to remain in error, for so many ages, upon so important a point?

John. Well, Sir, do you know that the other day I asked my brother what he thought about that very thing. But he did not look at it as you do. He said that such points as infant Baptism must be settled by the Bible only.

Clergyman. Undoubtedly the Bible is the touchstone by which we must "prove all things." Yet the general practice of the Church, in all ages, is not to be lightly set aside. St. Paul himself appeals to the custom of different Churches, as being a matter of weight, in 1 Cor. xi. 16: "We have no such custom, neither the Churches of God." The real question as to the Bible is this,—has any one ever yet pretended to quote a passage from any part of Scripture which forbids infant Baptism, or warns us against it? On the other hand, we do find in Scripture direct intimations of the will of God, which seem to lead us naturally to hold infant Baptism. For instance:—How were children

dealt with under the Old Covenant which God made with His chosen people ?

John. Why, we know that the Jews were commanded to circumcise their children on the eighth day after their birth.

Clergyman. Exactly so. The covenant into which God entered with the Jews embraced their children ; and circumcision, which was the sign and the seal of that covenant, was to be administered to their children at eight days old. Now, can we think that God, who made a covenant with the infants of Israel, has made none with the children of Christian parents ? Would not this imply that God does not love the Church so much as He loved the Synagogue, and that the mercies of the Gospel are more limited and restrained than those of the Law ?

John. That, I am sure, is not the case. The glory of the Christian covenant is that its blessings and promises are so large and free.

Clergyman. Then if the covenant itself, with its blessed promises, is thus open to our children, it seems to follow that the sign and seal of that covenant is not to be refused to them. Does it not seem so to you ?

John. Certainly. And you mean that Baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant ?

Clergyman. Yes, I do. Then again, besides this strong intimation of the will of God, how many passages there are in the Bible, which seem expressly to say that children are especial objects of the favour of our Heavenly Father ; and that the blessings of the new

covenant were intended for them, as well as for others. As for instance in Isaiah xliv. 3, 4, "I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring. And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the watercourses." And Jeremiah xxxi. 34, "They shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them; saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." St. Peter seems to have alluded to these prophecies, when he said in Acts ii. 39, "The promise is unto you, and to your children." But, indeed, our Blessed Lord's own words seem to me the strongest and the most convincing argument. "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God⁶." What can be more striking than the love and tenderness which our Saviour always showed for little children? Who can doubt that One who is described as the good Shepherd gathering the lambs with His arm, and carrying them in His bosom⁷, will favourably receive our little ones when they are presented to Him in Baptism, and will embrace them in the arms of His mercy? To doubt this, appears to me to be doubting all that is revealed to us of our Saviour's gentleness and tenderness for the lambs of His flock, the little ones of His kingdom. In one word, when people say that infant Baptism is not agreeable

⁶ Mark x. 14.

⁷ Isa. xl. 11.

to Scripture, it seems to me that they do not properly feel what is the spirit that runs through all Scripture. The spirit of the Bible seems to me to require it, as plainly, almost, as express words could do. I can quite understand a man saying, as the great Martin Luther did, "Of all Baptism, infant Baptism seems to me the surest ⁸."

John. I am much obliged to you, Sir, for going into this subject so fully; I see that there is a great deal more to be said in favour of infant Baptism than I thought when I began to talk to you. It seems to me now to be right and scriptural.

Clergyman. Think over what I have said, John. Look at your Bible, and see whether these things are so or not. And, above all, pray for the light of the Holy Spirit of God, that you may have a right judgment in all things, and may be led into all truth.

⁸ Quoted by Stier (Words of Jesus), in a note on Matt-xxviii. 18—20.





