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FUNDAMENTAL BAPTIST PRINCIPLES.



The first cardinal principle of Baptists, which I mention, is the necessity for personal regeneration by the Holy Spirit. On this fundamental truth Christ laid the greatest emphasis. In speaking alike to the frail woman at Jacob's well and to the proud Nicodemus in Jerusalem, the Master taught the necessity of regeneration—that each human soul must be born of the Spirit, and thus born to an eternal life. “Ye must be born again.” (John iii., 7.)

This truth is directly opposed to the idea of salvation by works and to all sacerdotalism and sacramentalism. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit and not the result of ritual observance of any kind. Nor can regeneration be effected by education or training. Learning catechisms, liturgies, commandments or what-not, cannot avail. What man supremely needs

is not information, but a new nature. Man is "dead in trespasses and sins," and that death will be eternal unless he be quickened by the Spirit into newness of life. Spiritual life must be imparted to the human soul, or there is no hope. Paul writes to the Christians at Ephesus: "And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Ephesians ii., 1.) The change is fundamental and radical. Man does not need simply culture and favorable environment; he needs spiritual life, which only the Holy Spirit can impart.

The next cardinal principle of Baptists is that Christ, and He alone, is the Savior of men. We are not to depend upon Christ plus the church, or plus our good works, or plus the ordinances, for salvation. It is simply Christ, who saves. We are not saved because we are good, because we have done well, because we have been baptized, because we have been church members, or because of anything except that we have received Christ as our Lord and Savior. It is not—He that believeth on the Son AND LIVES A GOOD LIFE, or, AND IS FAITHFUL TO THE END, or, AND SUBMITS TO CERTAIN RITES AND CEREMONIES, hath everlasting life. What Christ said was: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." (John iii., 36.) "Thou must save and thou alone."

Another vital principle of Baptists is that each soul is personally and directly responsible to God. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself unto God." (Rom. xiv., 12.) The Bible gives no warrant for proxy religion. There is but one mediator between God and man—Jesus Christ. Parents cannot act for their children, sponsors cannot act for their "godchildren," priests cannot act for their people; nor church, nor council, nor clergy, nor ceremonies nor anything can come between the soul and God. The Gospel comes home to men as individuals and not in groups and classes—"He that believeth," "let him that is athirst," "whosoever believeth," "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out," "to him that asketh"—such are the expressions used in the New Testament in presenting the Gospel offer. Note the HE, HIM, WHOSOEVER, etc. The call is to the individual. Men are not converted EN MASSE, but individually. Each one must repent, believe, obey and give account for himself. While our lives are linked in many ways with the lives of others, and we are "our brother's keeper," in that we must seek to benefit and save him, yet our responsibility, even for this, is direct to God.

This great truth sweeps away all priests, sponsors, sacerdotalism, sacramentalism and whatever comes between the individual soul

and its Lord. Each soul is to hear and answer for himself the gracious invitation: "Come unto me," and all the world cannot hinder him. This truth sweeps away infant baptism, which nullifies the great command to be baptized, by substituting a ceremony in which the subject has no agency, for the personal obedience God requires of that subject, when he reaches years of accountability. A man who has been baptized (?) in infancy, on reading the command laid upon him in the New Testament, must either repudiate his infant baptism or refuse to obey this command of Christ.

Growing out of these principles comes the great doctrine of a regenerated church membership. So far from joining the church in order to be saved, no man should join until he is saved. Being saved is the one indispensable prerequisite to New Testament church membership. Instead of baptism being essential to salvation, salvation is essential to baptism. Regenerated souls are the lively stones in the temple God is rearing in honor of His Son. Church members in the New Testament are called "saints." Rom. i., 7.; I. Cor. i., 2; II. Cor. i., 1; Eph. i., 1; Phil. i., 1; Col. i., 2; always they are spoken of as redeemed, converted, saved, the children of God. There is nowhere a hint favoring the idea of receiving unconverted material into the churches.

It is not claimed that Baptist churches are free from unregenerated members. Alas! the contrary is often painfully apparent. But this is the great Baptist principle, and in so far as our churches are careless in receiving members; in just so far are they false to one of their great fundamental doctrines. Since we cannot see the heart, we are bound to rely largely on the profession of the candidate for baptism, and yet that profession should be carefully examined.

Each church is independent. The Bible countenances no territorial organization, no hierarchy, no diocesan government. Each church is a local assembly of baptized believers banded together for the upholding of the Kingdom of Heaven according to the directions laid down in the New Testament. No council, conference, assembly, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, patriarch or Pope, has any right to rule over the churches of Jesus Christ. Still less has the State any right to control the Churches. There must be a complete separation of Church and State. The magistrate has no authority over the conscience. We read of "the church at Corinth," "the church at Ephesus," "the church at Smyrna," etc. We also read in the New Testament of "the churches of Judea," "the churches of Asia," "the churches of Galatia," etc. Always the plural is used whenever more than one local assembly is included.

Each church has a very simple organization. It has pastor (or bishop), deacons and private members. Pastors and deacons are to be ordained, but the deacons are not preachers. In the qualifications laid down for deacons, aptness to teach is not given. There are no ranks among preachers, nor "orders" in the ministry. Paul in writing to the church in Philippi addresses the "saints," "bishops" and "deacons" with no hint of the existence of any other class. (Phil. i., 1.) And no other class is anywhere recognized.

There are but two ordinances in the church—baptism and the Lord's supper. Baptism is only for believers. We nowhere read in Scripture about infants being baptized. Everywhere faith comes first. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark xvi., 16. "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized." Acts ii., 41. "And many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized." Acts xviii, 8. Baptism does not come in the place of circumcision, because the ideas of the two are radically different; because the Council at Jerusalem (Acts xv.) discussing whether Gentiles should be circumcised, decided on entirely other grounds; because Paul took Timothy and circumcised him after he had been baptized (Acts xv., 1-3), and because Paul was at trouble and expense to prove to the Jewish

Christians at Jerusalem that he had not taught Jewish parents not to circumcise their children, which he must have taught them had baptism taken the place of 'circumcision. (Acts xxi., 20-24.)

The only valid act for baptism is immersion. Such is the meaning of the word translated baptize, according to all authorities, and according to an overwhelming majority of the leading scholars of all denominations; and such is the plain meaning of Scripture. Jesus was baptized "in the Jordan." There is plenty of water there, for I have myself been to the river Jordan, where Christ was baptized, and waded in up nearly to my arm pits. Our Lord did but one act which He called baptism. He did not do three things and give us our choice. Nay, verily, He did but the one, and we are commanded to follow Him. Philip and the eunuch (Acts viii., 38-39,) "went down both into the water" and came "up out of the water." Paul says: "We are buried with him by baptism." (Rom. vi., 4.) Hence baptism buries us.

MARTIN LUTHER said: "For to BAPTIZE in Greek is to DIP, and BAPTIZING is dipping." (Works: Wittemb. Ed., vol. ii., p. 79.)

DEAN STANLEY says: "There can be no question that the original form of baptism—the very meaning of the word—was complete immersion in deep baptismal waters." (Hist. E. Ch., p. 117.)

JOHN CALVIN says: "The very word BAPTIZE signifies to immerse; and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church." (Inst. Bk. iv., ch. 15.)

JOHN WESLEY says: "WE ARE BURIED WITH HIM, alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion." (Notes on N. T. Ran. vi., 4.)

These are but samples.

The Lord's Supper is a church ordinance; a simple memorial "This do in remembrance of me." It is no means of grace. It imparts no spiritual power. It is not for deathbeds to prepare souls for eternity. It is to be observed only in the church, and is to be partaken of only by those who have made a credible profession of faith, who have been baptized and who have an orderly church membership. (Cor. xi., 23 ff.; Acts ii., 41; I. Cor. vii., 12; II. John x., 11.)

DR. WALL (Episcopalian) says: "Among all the absurdities that ever were held, none ever maintained that any person should partake of the communion before he was baptized." (Hist. Inf., Bap., part ii., c. 9.)

DR. DODDRIDGE (Presbyterian) says: "It is certain that, so far as our knowledge of antiquity reaches, no unbaptized person received the Lord's Supper." (Lectures, p. 5; also pp. 11, 12.)

DR. HIBBARD (Methodist) says: "In one principle Baptist and Pedobaptist churches agree. They both agree in rejecting from the communion at the table of the Lord: . . . all who have not been baptized." (Chr. Bapt. ii., p. 174.)

These, too, are but samples.

Church polity and ordinances are the molds of doctrine. Baptists do not stand simply for polity and ceremonies; far from it. They stand for the doctrines of which these are the molds, and for strict obedience to Christ in all things. History shows that departures from New Testament order and ordinances have ever been accompanied by departures from New Testament doctrines. Errors in order and ordinances crystallize and render permanent errors in doctrine. Hence it is of the greatest importance to maintain unchanged and unsullied the polity and ordinances of the New Testament.

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