

BAPTISM BEFORE THE LORD'S SUPPER.

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A LATE number of the Richmond *Religious Herald* contains a brief letter from Rev. Dr. Caswell, President of Brown University, on the relation of Baptism to the Lord's Supper, and the duties of Baptists growing out of it. In the course of the letter he says :

The *very strong presumption*, to my own mind, is that baptism preceded the Supper, in the practice of the primitive church. And that, I think, of course should be the rule. But can that be shown to rest upon any *positive command of Christ* or the Apostles? If it cannot be shown, then are we called upon to make assent to this doctrine of "close communion" a test question in admitting members to our churches?

Now, is it really a question whether, by the command of the Master and in the practice of the Apostles, baptism precedes and is a prerequisite to the Lord's Supper? Is there really nothing more than a *very strong pre-*

sumption that such was the fact? Is not the fact as certain as the most explicit language and the most unvarying usage could make it? If it *is*, it must be capable of being shown, and *ought* to be shown, so that all reasonable doubt shall be laid to rest. If it is not, Baptist churches—and all churches—ought to understand it, and adjust their usage to the state of the evidence. For myself, I do not see how a candid and careful survey of the language and usage of the New Testament can allow us to doubt that the injunction of our Lord did most distinctly and unequivocally place baptism in advance of the Lord's Supper. Three things concur in forcing me to this conclusion: The nature of the two rites, the command of the Lord, and the practice of his Apostles.

What *is* the baptism of the New Testament? It is the act by which the new-born believer outwardly and symbolically puts off his body of sin and puts on Christ; by which he professedly dies to the world, and rises to and with Christ in a spiritual resurrection. It is the assumption, by the new-born child of God, of the badge of sonship and discipleship—the act by which he

formally, publicly, solemnly, enrolls himself among the followers of the Redeemer. Where, then, does it properly come? I answer, it follows immediately upon that act of faith by which he has allied himself to the Redeemer. It is the birth from water, following upon and symbolizing the birth from the Spirit; it is the "bath (washing) of regeneration," accompanying and sealing the "renewing of the Holy Ghost." It has its fixed and definite place in the believer's life. It stands at the threshold; it belongs to the starting-point of the life, and *nowhere else*. It is to be performed *once*, and *once for all*. It is not a duty of the professed believer; it is the specific outward mode in which its subject *becomes* a professed believer.

And what is the Lord's Supper? It is the professed disciple's recognition, from time to time, of that death which brings him life, and of him who suffered it. It is the church's standing mode of declaring to an unbelieving world her faith in her unseen Lord—of rekindling, through affecting visible symbols, her memory of his self-sacrificing love, and her hope of his glorious re-ap-

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pearing. It is in its nature designed for repetition—to be done over and over again—the frequently repeated spiritual banquet of the Lord's house. "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

The difference in the nature of the two ordinances thus fixes their relation to each other. The one stands at the gateway of the believer's course; is done once for all, and never repeated. It is his act of enlistment—of consecration—and its proper significance would be destroyed either by postponement or by repetition. The other is the prerogative of the professed and living Christian; it is part of the rich provision made by the Lord of the way to refresh his spirit, and cheer the toil and burden of his pilgrimage. In accordance, now, with this, is our Saviour's command. Where has he placed baptism? On whom has he enjoined it? "Go ye, and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name," etc. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." Nothing can be more explicit than this language. It couples in indissoluble union faith and baptism; the faith preceding, as the essential act—the

baptism following, as the commanded and obligatory symbol.

And how did the Apostles interpret their Lord's command? Were there a single case recorded of apparent departure from its obvious requirement, we might hesitate in our judgment. But there is not one. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of sins." "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" "Lo, here is water," said the just converted eunuch, "what doth hinder me to be baptized? And . . . he baptized him." "He washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, straightway"; and such is the unbroken tenor of the New Testament testimony. Baptism appears everywhere as the new-born believer's mode of testifying his faith in Christ; of declaring his discipleship; of turning his back on his former life of sin, and of dedicating himself henceforth to a life of devotion to Christ.

When, then, we are asked whether Christ has distinctly *commanded* that baptism should precede admis-

sion to the Lord's Table, we answer unhesitatingly that he has. If we are asked where, we reply, in every instance in which he has given the command, either directly or indirectly, that we be baptized at all. He has made it the *first* act consequent upon and declaratory of the repenting sinner's acceptance of him as a Saviour. He has placed it at the head of those acts which mark him as an acknowledged follower of the Redeemer. He has placed it there, and nowhere else. To have formally and in terms stated that baptism must precede the Lord's Supper, would have been utterly gratuitous. It precedes it by its distinctive nature, and the place which the Lord has assigned to it in the Christian life. Baptism precedes the Supper as necessarily as the Roman soldier's *sacramentum*—his military oath—preceded his discharging a soldier's duties and receiving a soldier's pay; as necessarily as the Hebrew priest's anointing preceded his discharge of priestly functions. If we are commanded to be baptized at all, we are commanded to be baptized in the place and for the purpose in and for which the rite is enjoined. To refuse to submit to it at

this point—to remove it from this place—is an act of disobedience. If a man is required, first of all, to testify his faith by baptism—then for him to thrust himself, unbaptized, into the assembly of believers, and assume their prerogatives—is a flagrant impertinence. He is subverting a divine command. He is not merely changing the place of an ordinance—he is setting aside and nullifying it. For, if he may interpose one season for the observance of the Supper between his faith and his baptism, he may a thousand; if he may refuse at the outset to make his declaration of faith in the way prescribed by the Lord, he may, and he logically will, refuse it all his life.

We would by no means hurry a penitent believer in submitting to baptism, before he is well assured in his own mind. But we do say that the order of baptism and the Lord's Supper would seem to be as fixed as a positive enactment can make it. It lies imbedded in the nature of the ordinances, the command of Christ, and the practice of his Apostles. These, together, form a three-fold cord of argument, which cannot be broken.

To attempt breaking it, is to rend asunder the divinely instituted union between faith and baptism. Our Lord's command links it with the first act of faith, and places it at the starting-point of the Christian life, as the expression of the allegiance which he has inwardly vowed, and the symbol of the regeneration which he has experienced. To remove it from that place is virtually to abrogate it altogether; for it is removing it from the place which the Lawgiver assigned to it, which Apostolic usage assigned to it, and in which alone it has significance and propriety. He who does so, does it at his peril.