

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM EXPLAINED

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Christian Baptism Explained by William Grant

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WILLIAM GRANT

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INTRODUCTION.

THERE are two ordinances which Christ has appointed for permanent use in His Church, which are distinguished from all the rest by this marked and striking outward peculiarity; *viz.*, that they are symbolical or emblematical, *i. e.*, they speak to us by visible signs. These are Baptism, with its symbol of Water, and The Lord's Supper with its symbols of Bread and Wine. *

* From an early period in the history of the Church, these two ordinances have been called "THE SACRAMENTS." The original meaning of that title cannot now be accurately ascertained. Some have objected to its continued use in Protestant churches, (1) because it is not found in the Scriptures, and (2) because it has long been associated with the unscriptural and superstitious ideas which the Romish Church attaches to these ordinances. But when we use it merely to describe *those symbolical ordinances whose signs are of divine appointment*, it is a convenient and

We are, therefore, naturally and necessarily led to enquire, what uses this striking outward peculiarity was intended, and is fitted, to serve? In other ordinances, as in the Scriptures and in Prayer, *words* are the medium of communication between God and men. In the Sacraments *signs* are employed. What purpose was intended to be served by this marked and obvious peculiarity?

Reader! thou hast a distinct and well-defined idea of the use of *words* in Scripture and in Prayer. They are an intelligible medium of communication between God and men. But, hast thou as clear an idea of the use of *signs* in the Sacraments? Thou mayest have some idea of the use of the signs of the Lord's Supper. But is it not a strange and unnatural thing if thou art, and art content to remain, in doubt or darkness in regard to

compendious way of expressing a complex thought. This title is not found in the Scriptures, but the idea is. In the Christian Church there are two, and only two symbolical ordinances whose signs have been appointed by God. These, and these alone, are Sacraments.

the use of the signs of Baptism ; which, as the initial ordinance of the New Testament, may well be supposed to be the simplest and most elementary of all.

Yet it is to be feared that there are few subjects in regard to which more ignorance or error prevails, or from which, because of supposed difficulties, more turn away in despair. We do not refer to difficulties in regard to the proper subjects of Baptism—who should be baptised. Nor in regard to the proper manner of its administration—by dipping, pouring, or sprinkling, but only in regard to the spiritual uses it was intended to serve.

Baptism has been appointed by Christ for the spiritual benefit of His Church. Error or ignorance in regard to its intended uses must be prejudicial to the interests of individuals, may be fatal in the teaching of churches. It is of the highest importance clearly to understand what its real and intended uses are.

What, then, are thy difficulties in regard to the right uses of Baptism? Dost thou recoil, on the one hand, from the Romish or Ritualistic idea, that some mysterious, magical, or mechani-

cal virtue attends the mere outward dispensation of Baptism ; and, on the other hand, from the Rationalistic idea, that Baptism is merely an outward, formal symbol of admission into the visible Church, an external badge of Ecclesiastical privilege, without any promise of inward grace following ? Dost thou reject the latter idea as erroneous in the way of *defect*, inasmuch as Scripture teaches that Baptism is a means of grace ? and the former as erroneous in the way of *excess*, inasmuch as Scripture nowhere ascribes a mysterious, magical, or mechanical power to any outward ordinance, apart from the exercise of an inward and intelligent faith in Christ ?

And dost thou now desire clearly to see, and firmly to grasp some idea which, on the one hand, shall not ignore those solemn and thrilling emotions which Scripture warrants, and which we often feel when we participate in the dispensation of Baptism ; and yet which, on the other hand, shall explain these emotions, not in a vague and shadowy way which we can neither analyse nor explain, but in such an intelligent and intelligible way that reason can

understand them, Scripture approve of them, and experience confirm them ?

We believe that such an explanation of Baptism is greatly needed at the present time, and is eagerly desired by many. It is the object of the present treatise to supply that want—not in the way of a controversial argument, but in the form of a plain and practical statement of the doctrinal and devotional uses of Baptism.

The idea of Baptism which pervades and characterizes this treatise is—(1.) That in the divinely-appointed symbols of Baptism, we have a short, simple, and authoritative summary of the substance of God's message to man, and of what man's prayer to God should be. In this respect it corresponds, on the one hand, with the Word of God, and on the other hand with the prayers of men ; and differs from them in this, that it employs visible signs instead of, or in addition to, audible words.

(2.) That in whatever sense, or in whatever way, the Holy Spirit of God employs the words of Scripture and of prayer as outward means for conveying inward grace to the souls of men, in the same sense, and in the same way, and no

otherwise, He employs the signs of Baptism. There is nothing more nor less efficacious or mysterious in the use of significant signs, than in the use of intelligible words. Both are natural and familiar means for enlightening the minds, and influencing the hearts of men. And both are, and can be, effectual for any saving change, only by the inward working of the Holy Spirit of God.

This is the spiritual or Scriptural idea of Baptism, as distinguished from the Ritualistic and Rationalistic. It teaches that the Holy Spirit of God employs the outward ritual of Baptism, in a rational way, for imparting inward grace to the souls of men.

Such, briefly, is the idea of Baptism (equally applicable to the Lord's Supper) which pervades and characterises this treatise, and in accordance with which we desire to explain its doctrinal and devotional uses.

The uses of Baptism may be considered from two distinct points of view—Personal, or Ecclesiastical. Personal, as teaching us in what relation the baptised stand, or may stand, towards God. Ecclesiastical, as teaching us