

[R1590 : page 313]

OPINIONS OF BAPTISTS NOT BAPTIST DOCTRINES.

EXCEPTION has been taken by several of our friends (who are or were connected with the Baptists) to our statement of Baptist doctrine relative to water immersion. They hold that we are in error in supposing that Baptists lay stress upon *water immersion* [R1590 : page 314] *as essential to salvation*. They claim that they never did so believe, even before getting the fuller light of present truth upon this and other subjects; that many able writers amongst the Baptists have held, and clearly stated, that it is *not essential*; that intelligent Baptists everywhere so hold; and that merely amongst the ignorant does the view prevail that only those immersed in water will be saved; – thus dissenting from other Christians, who hold that it is *necessary*, and who therefore give attention to the matter with infants.

We are glad to make this statement public. Before doing so we verified it by having a representative interview with five Baptist ministers (three whites and two blacks). The colored ministers understood that salvation and the *new birth* were secure to those only who, *after reaching years of accountability*, have been immersed in water; – interpreting thus the statement, "He that believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved." The other three ministers denied that water-immersion is essential to salvation. Two of these declared that it attests that the mind, the heart, is submissive to the will of the Lord, and is the outward answer of a good conscience toward God. The other one held substantially the views presented in the WATCH TOWER publications – that a full *consecration of the will* is the true immersion into Christ, – into death with him to self and the

world, which is symbolized by the water-immersion. And this one confessed that he had recently read MILLENNIAL DAWN.

These ministers were also sounded as to their faith in Christ, not merely as an Exemplar or model, but also as man's *ransom-price* before God's law; as the one "who gave himself a ransom [*a corresponding price*] for all." Two of them (one white and one colored) were clear and strong upon both features of our Lord's work – the ransom and the example; – and both of these had read MILLENNIAL DAWN; two others (one white and one colored) confessed faith only in our Lord's example as his saving power or influence over sinners, and ignored the ransom without specially opposing it. The fifth utterly repudiated the *ransom*, declaring that to him it was absurd to think of Christ's death paying man's debts in any sense. He scoffed at the sentiment of that precious and Scriptural hymn: –

"Jesus died and paid it all,
Yes, all the debt I owed."

Christ to him was a noble example of how to live. He did not say if he considered that he or others had ever lived or could live according to that example, and thus be justified before God by their own right-doing. When asked, Do not the Scriptures declare that "Christ died *for us*?" he answered, Yes; but so also did the heroes of the Revolutionary war die *for our liberty*. But he did not and could not explain how it came (if Christ died *for us* in the *same sense* that the Revolutionary heroes died *for us*) that the death of the latter affected only the present life and welfare, while the Bible clearly states that Christ's death was for our sins and that it affects the *future life*; and that by his stripes we are healed and have access to God, being no longer reckoned and treated as enemies under wrath and condemnation, but received to God's favor as sons. Surely it does not require a very

astute mind to see that Christ died for us in a *very different* sense from what the Revolutionary heroes died for us.

* * *

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as "Baptist doctrine," *because* there is at present no such thing as a Baptist Denomination. There are hundreds of congregations calling themselves Baptists, but they profess to be thoroughly independent of each other. Each congregation decides what it believes and what it will require in faith and practice from its members and its minister. As a consequence, for one to tell you that he is a Baptist assures you of nothing respecting his faith, except that he is a believer in water-immersion.

Nevertheless, we have much sympathy with this spirit of independence. But we would carry it farther, and insist that the different congregations should not make doctrines and practices (including water-immersion) *tests* of membership – except those practices of morality enjoined by our Lord and the apostles, and [R1591 : page 314] the doctrine of faith in Christ as the *ransomer* [R1591 : page 315] of sinners, and consecration to his will as expressed in the teachings of the Scriptures. But such congregations would have no further use for the name Baptist; for baptism would no longer be the standard and test of fellowship among them. The name *Christian* would then be preferable; and faith in Christ as the sin-bearer, and full consecration to his service, being the only tests, would be implied by the profession of that only name. Such was and is the Lord's will on this subject, and such is the practice of many WATCH TOWER readers.

* * *

While Baptist congregations have for centuries maintained their independence of each other and of the Baptist Ministers'

Association, evidence is not lacking that instead of the tendency being toward individual (as well as congregational) liberty of faith (which would be the proper thing, as above pointed out), it is gravitating (as with Congregationalists), year by year, toward denominationalism; and we shall not be surprised to find Baptists a united body before long.

The spirit of the world is in the direction of union and combination. The world is always willing to compromise personal liberties and principles "*a little*" for the sake of prosperity; and this class is fast becoming the majority, and as such will rule: and the minority, instead of standing fast in the liberty of Christ, and withdrawing so as to preserve their individual freedom, will generally be persuaded that it is their duty to submit and not cause a disturbance. They falsely think that submission to the wrong of the worldly majority is part of the grace of patience enjoined by the Scriptures.

The tendency toward denominationalism and a common confession of faith comes chiefly from the Baptist Ministers' Association, which wields a mighty influence and practically moulds the faith of the Baptist people. Through it Baptists are practically a denomination now; for it is Baptist *usage* that a congregation desiring a pastor, but unable to fully support him, shall apply to the Association; and, if not yet "ordained," have him "ordained" at the hands of its members. And this Association will not recommend, nor ordain as a pastor, any one not in harmony with *its standard* of faith, – one therefore who would co-operate with them in teaching the people according to the faith-standard of the Ministerial Association.

These Associations are in themselves an evidence of the tendency toward denominationalism; for they are of recent institution, – beginning about fifteen years ago. Already they exercise great power – a money-power as well as a clerical-

power. Their general secretaries collect monies for Home missions: these monies are at the disposal of the Associations. Any new Baptist congregation unable to raise a sufficient salary to support a minister can, by giving its allegiance to the Baptist Ministers' Associations, get a minister. The Association pays the minister, and the congregation contributes what it can to the Association funds. Thus both minister and flock are bound to the Association's rules, etc. Ministers are yet further bound to the Association, because the latter undertakes to care for the widows and orphans of its deceased members.

Nevertheless, Baptists have much of the spirit of true Christian liberty; and generally they are not aware that they are so rapidly drifting into denominationalism, and already they are sectarian in that they make water-baptism a test of Christian fellowship; – that is, they refuse to admit to their communion table Christians who have not been immersed; and frequently they refuse also those who have been immersed, but not by a regularly ordained Baptist minister. As a class of people they are therefore better prepared than others to receive present truth, and should be a fruitful class amongst whom to do harvest work. Let all who have opportunity thrust in the sickle of Truth – and do it quickly, "while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." – John 9:4.

"Saints of God, the dawn is brightening
With the glory of the Lord;
O'er the earth the field is whitening;
Now recall the Master's word –
Pray for reapers
In the harvest of the Lord."
