

"BAPTIST" VIEWS CHANGING.

TESTIMONY OF AUGUSTUS H. STRONG, D.D., LL.D.

DOCTOR STRONG is an authority among Baptists, the President of their principal theological seminary located at Rochester, N.Y. His public discourse, delivered at the "General Denominational Meeting" held in Cleveland, Ohio, last May, had the approval of that assembly as indicated by its "request" that the sermon be printed for general use. The changes of doctrinal views to which he calls attention may therefore be regarded by the public as endorsed by Baptists in general.

We are by no means opposed to changes of views, believing heartily in the old worldly adage, "A wise man changes sometimes, but a fool never." We were glad when our Presbyterian brethren displaced their old creed with a new one, but sorry they prevaricated on the subject by telling the world that they still retain the old creed – merely made a new statement of it.

Of course we agree with much that Dr. Strong has to say. Like other men of talent, he is able to state some matters in such terms that even his enemies and doctrinal opponents could not wholly dissent, and to so gloss other matters with sophistry as to mislead the uncritical and confiding of his hearers – whether educated or illiterate. We regret to note that such tendencies – called "diplomacy" in politics, "shrewdness" in business circles, and "falsehood" in common parlance – are more and more creeping over all prominent theologians. Their excuse, we presume, would be "necessity."

Christendom is admittedly in a time of creedal upheaval and transformation, and quiet *deception* of the "old fogies" is considered a virtue, preventing a serious commotion. The hope is that the rising generation will by these deceptive phrases be kept in line until the

"old fogies" are all dead, and then it can be pointed out that "our denomination changed its views slightly in your fathers' days and without their protest, and hence with their indorsement," and thus the most radical changes would pass unchallenged by the masses.

All this is a great mistake – a seriously wrong course, even though pursued with good intentions. It amounts to – "Let us do evil that good may follow: let us continue to dishonor God and practise double-dealing on our too-confiding flocks, that our denominations may maintain their standing, numbers and influence, and that we may preserve our dignity, honor of men and light and remunerative employment."

But let us examine these Baptist changes and note whether or not they mark advances or retrogressions, as viewed from the Biblical standpoint. We begin with their –

"OLD AND NEW VIEWS OF SIN."

"But our fathers did not see, as we do, that man's relation to Christ antedated the Fall and constituted an underlying and modifying condition of man's life. Humanity was naturally in Christ, in whom all things were created and in whom they all consist. Even man's sin did not prevent Christ from still working in him to counteract the evil and to suggest the good. There was an internal, as well as an external, preparation for man's redemption. In this sense, of a divine principle in man striving against the selfish and godless will, there was a total redemption, over against man's total depravity; and an original grace, that was even more powerful than original sin.

"The great Baptist body has become conscious that total depravity alone is not a sufficient or proper expression of the truth; and the phrase has been outgrown. It has been felt that the old view of sin did not take account of the generous and noble aspirations, the unselfish efforts, the strivings after God, of even unregenerate men. For this reason there has been less preaching about sin, and less

conviction as [R3457 : page 340] to its guilt and condemnation. The good impulses of men outside the Christian pale have been often credited to human nature, when they should have been credited to the indwelling spirit of Christ. I make no doubt that one of the radical weaknesses of our denomination at this present time is its more superficial view of sin."

Here we find a new error introduced as an antidote for an old one. There is not one word in the Bible about "total depravity." Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians got this phrase and conception from Calvin. It is an absurdity on its face. The proper, Scriptural thought is this, *Man is so depraved as to be totally unable to recover himself*, so as to regain perfection and divine fellowship. This is the Scriptural proposition – substantiated by all the New Testament writings.

Why are all the creeds which contain this "total depravity" feature gaining in disrepute? Because it fixes matters for the heathen and infants – negating the idea that these could pass into heaven acceptable to God without faith and regeneration. All along, these qualities of faith and regeneration in the parent have been counted as sufficing for his children dying in infancy; but, with the eternal torment idea still latent, modern thinkers with any heart repudiate the thought that all but regenerated believers and their children, the great mass of humanity, are rushing into such an awful eternity at the rate of over 80,000 every twenty-four hours.

But note the *new error*, that it is worse than the former in that it is more subtle, – sophistry less likely to be detected by the average mind. Think of it! "Humanity was *naturally in Christ!*" Either the learned gentleman is sadly confused on the subject or else he is trying his best to confuse others. If the gentleman meant to say that divine grace planned a universal redemption before the fall occurred and that in due time and in some manner all the race will get a share of that blessed provision, he would be in full accord with us respecting

the Scripture teaching. If he meant this we assume that he would have said it.

We deny that "humanity was naturally in Christ." When Adam was perfect he needed not to be *in* Christ, for being sinless and in the divine image he had relationship with his Creator without a mediator. It was sin and its sentence that made necessary a Mediator and his work of (1) atonement for *our sins*, and (2) the [R3458 : page 340] deliverance of the willing and obedient from the *penalty of sin*, death.

Has Dr. Strong forgotten the words of the Apostle, pointing to the work of the cross as a previous essential to the return of sinners to God? Hearken – "When we were *enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." (Rom. 5:10.) "The friendship of the world is enmity against God." (Jas. 4:4.) "The world by wisdom knows not God." (I Cor. 1:21.) "Holy Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee." (John 17:25.) "The whole world lieth in the wicked one." (I John 5:19.) "Ye are of your father the devil, for his works ye do." (John 8:44.) "Ye are children of wrath even as others." (Eph. 2:3.) "Condemnation passed upon all because all are sinners." (Rom. 5:12.) Ye were "without God and having no hope in the world." (Eph. 2:12.) "If any man be in Christ *he is a new creature*; old things are passed away and all things are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17.) Does Dr. Strong think that *all* Baptists are so unfamiliar with their Bibles that they will fail to remember these and scores of other pointed statements to the same effect? Or does he think that, remembering these, the Baptist people will take his declarations as more inspired than those of our Lord and his apostles? We are in doubt – which?

Mark the Apostle's argument respecting Christ's relationship to the world and the universe. So far from intimating that the world is already in Christ, the Apostle declares that, "In the dispensation of

the fullness of times [the Millennium]" God will "gather together in one all things in Christ." – Eph. 1:10.

Let us next note the *new* Baptist views on "The Atonement." Dr. Strong says: –

"THE ATONEMENT.

"We must acknowledge also that our conceptions of Christ's atonement have suffered some change. Yet that change has been in the nature of a more fundamental understanding of the meaning of atonement, and its necessity as a law of universal life. To our fathers the atonement was a mere historical fact, a sacrifice offered in a few brief hours on the cross. It was a literal substitution of Christ's suffering for ours, the payment of our debt by another, and upon the ground of that payment we are permitted to go free. Those sufferings were soon over, and the hymn, "Love's Redeeming Work is Done," expresses the believer's joy in a finished redemption. And all this is true. But it is only a part of the truth.

"The atonement, like every other doctrine of Christianity, is a fact of life; and such facts of life cannot be crowded into our definitions, because they are greater than any definitions we can frame. The atonement is a substitution, in that another has done for us what we ought to have done but could not do, and has suffered for us what we deserved to suffer but could not suffer without loss of holiness and happiness forever and ever. But Christ's doing and suffering is not that of one external and foreign to us. He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; the bearer of our humanity; yes, the very life of the race. The life that he lived in Palestine and the death that he endured on Calvary were the revelation of a union with mankind which antedated the Fall. Being thus joined to us from the beginning, *he has suffered in all human sin*; in all our affliction he has been afflicted; so that the Psalmist can say: 'Blessed be God, who daily beareth our [R3458 : page 341] burden, even the God of our salvation.' So we add to the idea of SUBSTITUTION the idea of

SHARING; and *see in the cross, not so much the atonement itself*, as the revelation of the atonement.

"The sufferings of Christ take deeper hold upon us when we see in them the expression of the two great truths: that holiness must make penalty to follow sin; and that love must share that penalty with the transgressor."

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We cannot escape the conviction that the author of the above words did not want his hearers to understand his meaning; – that he desired to repeat the words *atonement* and *substitution* so as to give the impression that he still held the thoughts covered by those words, but that he now had *more, along the same lines*. The contrary is, we feel sure, the truth. This D.D., like all under the influence of "higher criticism" and Evolution theories, has lost faith in the Bible narrative of a primary sinless condition in Eden, when our first parents were in God's likeness, from which they fell into sin and its death penalty, from which they were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as man's *substitute*, effecting an atonement before God for original sin.

The gentleman seems to twist the plain word *atonement*, and as though he would have us understand that God and his creatures have always been *at-one* or in harmony, and that man did not know this and improperly supposed himself under a "curse" and needing a Redeemer. This view seems to be that the cross of Christ was not necessary to *secure* divine favor, but was expedient as a showing to man that God *always had loved him*, that God *never had "cursed"* or "sentenced" him and cast him off from divine favor. This is the new view common amongst clergymen of every school and denomination – the *no-ransom* view, which denies that the Lord *bought us*. – 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Cor. 7:23.

The italics of above quotation are ours; note them. The arguments are cunningly framed and deceptive. The Doctor does not

come out courageously and say, Our new theories entirely ignore and cast aside the doctrine of atonement for sinners by a ransom-substitute, and offers you instead the thought that our race never was perfect, hence never did fall from perfection and divine favor, hence never did sin any more than God expected they should, hence needed no redemption from sin and no release from a special sin-penalty, because there is none; and the story of Genesis about a fall and a sentence, and all the reiterations of the Lord and the apostles along the same lines are mere fudge, as all we learned "higher critics" have recently discovered.

Instead of thus telling the people plainly, the reverse policy, as usual, seems to be pursued – the policy of confusing the people by complex statements. Yet it may be that Doctor Strong is confused and is merely doing his best. The following statement from his sermon gives us a gleam of hope, though it leaves the presentation as a whole the more obscure. He says: –

"The moral influence of the atonement has taken deep hold upon our minds, and we are in danger of forgetting that it is the holiness of God, and not the salvation of men, that primarily requires it. When sharing excludes substitution, when reconciliation of man to God excludes reconciliation of God to man, when the only peace secured is peace in the sinner's heart and no thought is given to that peace with God which it is the first object of the atonement to secure, then our whole evangelical system is weakened, God's righteousness is ignored, and man is practically put in place of God."

RESTRICTED COMMUNION OF BAPTISTS

On this topic Dr. Strong said: –

"If I am asked whether Baptists still hold to restricted communion, I answer that our principle has not changed, but that many of us apply the principle in a different manner from that of our fathers. We believe that baptism logically precedes the Lord's

Supper, as birth precedes the taking of nourishment, and regeneration precedes sanctification. We believe that the order of the ordinances is an important point of Christian doctrine, and itself teaches Christian doctrine. Hence we proclaim it and adhere to it, in our preaching and in our practice. But we do not turn the Lord's Supper into a judgment-seat, or turn the officers of the church into detectives. We teach the truth and expect that the truth will win its way. We are courteous to all who come among us, and expect that they in turn will have the courtesy to respect our convictions and to set accordingly. But there is danger here that we may break from our moorings and drift into indifferentism with regard to the ordinances. The recent advocacy of open church membership is but the logical consequence of a previous concession of open communion. But I am persuaded that this new doctrine is confined to a very few among us.

"There is but one army of the living God, even though there are many divisions. We can emphasize our unity with other Christian bodies, rather than the differences between us. We can regard them as churches of the Lord Jesus, even though they are irregularly constituted."

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Here we see well-meant confusion. The Baptist contention of the past is either right or wrong. Their standpoint in years past was the Scriptural one that there is but one body of Christ – one Church, of many members, in many places. Now Dr. Strong tells of "other Christian bodies." Are there other heads to those other "bodies"? The Apostle wrote of "one body," *the* Church, and one "head," *the* Lord. (Rom. 12:5.) Have matters changed since that inspired record was given us? We think not. Each head and each body must claim to be the Christ; but as there **[R3458 : page 341]** is but one, the claims must be false and the claimants must be deluding themselves.

Evidently Baptists are drifting farther and farther into sectarianism – and that to their injury, though they are disposed to

glory in it. The Scriptures denounce Papacy as a false "body" under a false "head" – as being Antichrist or a counterfeit of the true Head and his body, the true Church. Baptists once saw this point distinctly. Why can they not see, too, that every system or body except *one* must be spurious, must be an imitation of that *one*? And that the head of every such system, whether Pope or Presbytery or Conference or Ministerial Union, is a false [R3459 : page 342] head over a false or spurious body, and constitutes one of the many antichrists or false Christs which our Lord's great prophecy predicted for the harvest of this Gospel age. – Matt. 24:24.

The difficulty with our Baptist brethren on this subject is their error in confounding *water baptism* with the *real baptism*, and the Church whose names are written on earth with the true Church, "whose names are written in heaven" – Heb. 12:23; DAWN Vol. VI., chap. 10.

BAPTISTS AND THE COMING OF CHRIST.

On this subject Dr. Strong's remarks call for our hearty endorsement. He says: –

"The faith in a second coming of Christ has lost its hold upon many Baptists in our day. But it still serves to stimulate and admonish the great body, and we can never dispense with its solemn and mighty influence. Christ comes, it is true, in Pentecostal revivals and in destructions of Jerusalem, in Reformation movements and in political upheavals. But these are only precursors of another and literal and final return of Christ, to punish the wicked and complete the salvation of his people. That day for which all other days are made will be a joyful day for those who have fought a good fight and have kept the faith. Let us look for and hasten the coming of the day of God. The Jacobites of Scotland never ceased their labors and sacrifices for their king's return. Their passionate devotion to his cause led hundreds of them to exile and to death. They never tasted wine without pledging their absent prince; they never joined in song

without renewing their oaths of allegiance. In many a prison cell and on many a battle field they rang out the strain:

"Follow thee, follow thee, wha wadna follow thee?
Lang hast thou lo'ed and trusted us fairly:
Chairlie, Chairlie, wha wadna follow thee?
King o' the Highland hearts, bonnie Prince Chairlie!"

"So they sang, so they invited him, until at last he came. But that longing for the day when Charles should come to his own again was faint and weak compared with the longing of true Christian hearts for the coming of their King. Charles came, only to suffer defeat, and to bring shame to his country. But Christ will come, to put an end to the world's long sorrow, to give triumph to the cause of truth, to bestow everlasting reward upon the faithful.

"Even so, Lord Jesus, come!
Hope of all our hopes the sum,
Take thy waiting people home!"

"Long, so long, the groaning earth,
Cursed with war and flood and dearth,
Sighs for its redemption-birth.

"Therefore come, we daily pray,
Bring the resurrection-day,
Wipe creation's curse away!"

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