

THE ACT

OF

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

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CHAP. IV. THE ACT DETERMINED BY ITS SYMBOLISM.

All are agreed that baptism, like the Supper, has a symbolical signification—that it represents some thing or things. If we can ascertain what the act or acts of baptism symbolizes, we can, without a doubt, determine the act. This would be called the internal evidence of the meaning of the term.

The apostle tells us (I Peter iii: 21) that baptism is a "**figure**"—a symbol—a rite appointed to **represent** something. Whatever it is said to do, it does **figuratively**—representatively. What baptism **figures** or symbolizes we must learn from Christ and his apostles.

I. It is claimed by the advocates of affusion that baptism was designed to represent, or **figure**, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is said to have been "**poured out**" on the day of Pentecost, and, therefore, the water of baptism should be poured out. There are two insurmountable objections to this theory.

(1) Baptism was originated and practiced three years before this event; and did it prefigure or typify the baptism of the Holy Spirit during this time, and then symbolize it afterward? Where do we learn this?

(2) The phrase itself—"pouring out"—applied to the "Holy Spirit," is confessedly a **figurative** expression, as is "baptism in the Holy Spirit"—for no sane man believes the Spirit was ever **literally** poured out. This would imply that the Holy Spirit was a material, and divisible into particles, as water or sand. Now, in all the Word, we never find a type of a type, a figure of a figure, any more than we can find a shadow of a shadow, in the physical world. A **figure** represents a **fact**, as a **shadow** does a **substance**. This theory is transparently absurd. Christ tells us what he designed his baptism to represent to our eyes, when he declared that it was "**to fulfill all righteousness.**" He did not mean that he fulfilled all righteousness **literally** in his baptism, but **figuratively** only.¹ The all righteousness he referred to was the work he came to earth to do for us—believing, trusting solely in which constitutes our all-sufficient righteousness before God. This work consisted of three grand achievements—his death on the cross, where he made full satisfaction for our sins to the divine government; his burial and conquest over death and the grave for us; and his resurrection, by which he assured our resurrection. Paul says (I Cor.), These three acts constitute the Gospel by which we are saved, if we rightly apprehend and believe them—*i. e.*, 1. How that Christ died for our sins; 2. That he was buried; 3. That he rose the third day.

These grand acts Christ figured—represented to the eyes of all beholders—in his baptism. He was buried (Rom. vi.) in the water, thus implying his death; he was raised out of the water, thus representing his rising from the grave. It was thus he fulfilled all righteousness; and it is thus he requires us to represent in our baptism what he did for us.

"Thus did the glorious Prince of Life
All righteousness fulfill,
In emblem of that fiercer strife,
Where, by his Father's will,
He sank beneath death's darker flood,
And angels saw him bathed in blood."

¹ See Doctrinal Sermons No. 2—"The Symbolism of Baptism." Price, 10 cents.

Christ called his crucifixion a baptism: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"—(Luke xii: 50.)

Paul spoke of baptism as a representation of the crucifixion of Christ:

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been set forth [represented as] crucified among you?"—(Gal. iii: 1.)

Not to their ears only had it been described, but also represented "before their eyes."

2. In writing to the brethren at Rome (vi: 6), Paul incidentally refers to the profession they made in their baptism, by way of refuting the idea that Christians could continue in sin. He argues that it was impossible for them to do it, if their profession was true—for, in their baptism, they had professed to be dead **to** sin, and had symbolically declared this by being buried in their baptism, and had professed to have entered upon a new life, by the act of their rising out of the water; and more, that, having been planted—buried—in the **likeness** of Christ's death, they would at last rise, **physically**, in the likeness of Christ's resurrection. We represent, therefore, in our baptism, the **death, burial** and **resurrection** of Christ; and that we have received the benefits of this death, and shall finally be raised, bodily, in his likeness.

Paul (I Cor. xv: 29) evidently refers to baptism as symbolizing the resurrection of the dead; "Else what shall they do who are baptized for [the resurrection of] the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why then are they baptized for the resurrection of the dead?"

The context demands that the term " resurrection " should be understood as referring primarily to the resurrection of Christ, and secondarily to our own, since his was an earnest of ours. This appeal to the profession they made in their baptism was an **argumentum ad hominem**, as logicians would say. They could not believe with those who said, "There is no resurrection of the dead," without renouncing the faith they had symbolically professed in baptism—of their own resurrection.

The most eminent Pedobaptist scholars and commentators agree that the above is the symbolism of Christian baptism.

McKnight (Presbyterian):

"Christ's Baptism was not the baptism of repentance, for he never committed any sin; but he submitted to be baptized—that is, to be buried under the water by John, and to be raised up out of it again, as an emblem of his future death and resurrection. In like manner the **baptism of believers is emblematical of their death and resurrection.**"—*Prem. Ess. on Epis.*

- I. Jones, D. D. (President Girard College), in "Jesus and Coming Glory:"

"'Suffer it,' etc., rather *aphes arti*—'suffer at this time.' There is a tacit allusion to another time coming, as if the Lord had said, 'I have now come to offer the human body [*i. e.*, to pour out my divine soul] as a sacrifice for sin; and the baptism of it, which I seek at your hands, is a typical showing forth of the sacrifice I am to make; but I shall come at another time, and, at that, my second coming, this rite will not be proper, for then I will come without a sin offering, not in a body to be sacrifices for, but in, glory. May we not suppose that the Lord then first made known to him the mystery of his suffering and his death? It was after that, too, that John called Jesus the 'Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.' "

Conybeare and Howson (Episcopalians):

"With him, therefore, we are buried by baptism, wherein we [figuratively] shared his death. This clause, which is here left elliptical, is fully expressed in Col. ii: 12 : ' Buried with him in baptism,' etc. This passage can not be understood, unless it be borne in mind that the primitive baptism was by immersion."—*Notes on Romans.*

Baptism, then, was appointed to symbolize—1. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ, by which acts believers receive the benefits of his atonement; 2. That the recipient has, by faith, been vitally united with Christ, and received the benefits of his death, and will be raised with him in the likeness of his resurrection.

The reader can decide from this if he has ever been scripturally baptized. Sprinkling or pouring a few drops of water upon the head can not symbolize, or figure these grand facts, and hence are not the acts Christ commanded. An immersion of a believer in water will alone do it, and must have been the acts Christ commanded.