

CHAPTER VII.

Baptist authors have generally misstated the real issue between Baptists and others touching Communion—That is the lack of immersion that prevents Baptists inviting others, which is not the case.

The very first position our authors generally lay down, in defending our practice, is as manifestly untenable as it is false and fatal to Baptists—

“That the mere act of baptism is the real issue between Baptists and other denominations—i.e., because they have not been immersed in adult age, Baptists can not invite them to the Lord’s Table.”

The reader will find that in nearly every book and tract published, and sermon preached, and discussion held, in defense of our practice, the main position taken is, that it is not “close communion” but “close baptism” that separates us at the table. We meet this statement everywhere; we hear it everywhere; it is our sheet-anchor argument. The impression made by our authors and speakers is, if other denominations would only immerse adults, instead of sprinkling or pouring water upon them, all obstacles to intercommunion with them would be removed. Of the mass of books, tracts, and treatises issued in the last fifty years, I can examine but a few of the best known.

Dr. Howell, in his work on Communion, published by the American Baptist Publications Society, and republished in England, makes the following statements:

“We can not commune with Pedobaptists because, not having been immersed, they are not **baptized.**”

“These, briefly, are our reasons, and we believe they are good and sufficient reasons, for refusing to recognize the rite when administered in infancy. Pedobaptists have received no other baptism but this, which is a nullity. They are not baptized, and therefore, we dare not, until they are, admit them to the Lord’s Table.”—*Howell*, pp. 146-7, Eng. Ed.

It is clearly implied here, that if Pedobaptists would only adopt immersion every obstacle to intercommunion would be removed. Again:

“Nothing would be more pleasing to us than to go with them to the Lord’s Table, but we are repelled by the fact that a preliminary duty [baptism] is essential, and with this they have not complied.”—p. 23.

No one can mistake this language. Baptism is indicated as the only essential barrier that separates Baptists from the communion tables of Pedobaptists. Again:

“We have shown that we can not commune with Pedobaptists, because Jesus Christ expressly, as nearly all of them confess, requires baptism as a preliminary to Church Communion; and they have not, in our view, been baptized,” etc.—p. 452.

The impression is clearly made upon the minds of Pedobaptists that their societies are all right, as correct in all things as Baptist Churches, with the solitary exception—the lack of immersion!

We do not think this, by any means, a true statement of the case; and this author proves that it is not—in another part of his book, in which he shows that Pedobaptists administer both baptism and the Lord's Supper—for illegal purposes—*i.e.*, as sacraments of salvation; and that by communing with them, or in any way to recognize them as Churches of Christ, is to recognize the unregenerate as church members. He fails to show what the symbolism of the ordinance teaches or requires; indeed, the reader would not learn from this author that it had any symbolic signification whatever, which constitutes one of the radical defects of his work.

Rev. W. W. Gardner, D. D., late Professor of Theology in Bethel College, Ky., in his work on "Communion," in many respects an excellent work, falls into the same error of emphasizing the want of immersion as **the principal bar** to intercommunion with other denominations. He says:

"We learn, etc., (3) That it is not 'close communion,' in fact, but 'close **baptism**' that separates the Baptist and others at the Lord's Table."—p. 255.

The great question, then, that here divides us is, "What is **Scriptural baptism?**" Here is **the real issue** between us, and here the battle must and should be fought.—p. 251.

"In the language of Dr. Hibbard, 'The only question then, that divides us [*i.e.*, from Methodists] is, What is essential to vital baptism?'"—*Communion*, pp. 163 and 251.

He adds, on page 252, another obstacle:

"Until they [how many denominations he saith not] commune with us in believers' **immersion** and church **government**, we can not consistently and scripturally commune with them at the Lord's Table; and, as has been shown, it is both unkind and uncharitable in them to ask it. Hence, we see the charge of 'close communion' is no more applicable to the Baptists than to others. It is not 'close communion,' in fact, but 'close baptism' that separates us and others at the Lord's Table. This is admitted by the ablest advocates of mixed communion."

Whatever objections Dr. Gardner may suggest, here and there, in his defense, we see that he emphasizes his perfect agreement with Dr. Hibbard, that **the "only question that divides us from the Methodists and others is valid baptism."** Dr. Hibbard must have been aware that, could he lead Baptists into this snare, he would thereby secure their endorsement of the doctrines of Methodism!

But Dr. Gardiner, elsewhere in his book, shows that to commune with other denominations, would be **to pervert the design** of the Lord's Supper, since they hold and teach that it, like baptism, is "a **sacrament**"—an efficacious means of salvation. Also "**a test of brotherly love;**" and "a proof of our Christian liberality," and should **we** partake with **them**, we would indorse this unscriptural design. The impropriety of our inviting them to our table consists in our endorsement of their unscriptural form of baptism!

In our opinion Dr. Gardner, like all his predecessors, has signally failed to occupy the strong impregnable ground of defense of Close Communion, namely: "**The symbolic teachings of the ordinance.**"

“Restrictions of the Lord’s Supper” is the title of a little treatise by Rev. H. Colby, and issued by the American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, and therefore the exponent of the views of that society.

He, like the authors quoted, falls into their error, and poises the whole question upon **the lack of immersion** on the part of Pedobaptists.

“Our unwillingness, therefore, to invite to the Lord’s table Christian who have **not been immersed**, is so far from expressing a reluctance on our part to promote Christian union ‘that it emphasizes our anxiety for the establishment of union upon the only real foundation.’”—p. 9.

This foundation, he leaves no one to doubt, is the immersion of professed believers. Dr. T. G. Jones, in “*The Baptist*,” says:

“**The real issue** between Baptists and their Pedobaptist opponents **respects baptism** rather than the Lord’s Supper”...“In common with others, they believe that only the **baptized** are entitled to a place at the Lord’s table. And they believe that only such as have been **immersed upon a personal profession of faith** are baptized. Hence they can not, without gross inconsistency, as well as moral guilt, invite to the table of the Lord any, however pious and exemplary who have not, upon such profession been immersed.”

Dr. Hovey, president of Newton Theological Seminary, Massachusetts, so cautious and reliable in his statements, in his tract, “Close Communion,” page 68, says:

“In reality, the great question between other denominations, and the one for which we have endeavored to speak, relates to the subjects and the rites of baptism.”

Professor Curtis’s work on Communion, published by the American Baptist Publication Society, we consider, on the whole, the ablest Treatise that has yet appeared upon the “Lord’s Supper.”

Though he by no means discusses the symbolic teachings of the ordinance to any extent, or develops their real strength in support of strict Church Communion, yet he makes his strongest point in its favor, by **asserting**—not **proving**—from the one loaf itself, that “the Supper is a symbol of church relations, subsisting between those who unite together in the participation of it.”

Professor Curtis does not concede as much as the above-quoted authors, yet he makes the same unfortunate and fatal admission “that it is true that baptism is the **chief thing** that prevents us from affiliating with those Pedobaptist churches which are of similar faith and of congregational government.”—1. This concedes that their lack of baptism is **the** chief thing that bars us from their Communion; 2. His language implies that there are Pedobaptist churches—a church means that organization, or one equal to it, which Christ set up; and 3. That there are “Pedobaptist churches which are of similar faith” with Baptists! **If our faith and government** are identical, then it is true that baptism is the only thing that hinders intercommunion with them, **if intercommunion among Baptists is admissible.**

The very latest defense of our Communion, is a sermon on Communion, by R.M. Dudley, D.D., president of Georgetown College, Kentucky, published in “Baptist Doctrines,” which proposes to be an exponent of Baptist faith. He follows in the beaten track:

“This brings to the surface the fact that **the real difference** between Baptists and Pedobaptists is **not one of Communion at all**, but of baptism. And for our Pedobaptist brethren to cry out Close Communion, is not only wide of the mark, but ignoring the real issue. As has been said the

thousandth time, perhaps, 'It is close baptism;' they will not give the Supper to the unbaptized. We say no more than that, so the question between them and us is 'What is baptism?'"

Now exactly where Dr. Dudley stands, practically, on the Communion question we can not divine, for he advocates the validity of immersions by Campbellites and Pedobaptists, if not of Mormons and Universalists. Consistency compels him to advocate Communion with all who have been immersed on profession of their faith.

While many pages more could be filled with like statements, these must suffice to indicate how generally the position is taken by those able brethren who have been accepted to defend the practice of the denomination; and every author¹ whose book bears the *imprimatur* of the American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, that has come under my notice, takes this position, so that in the eyes of the world American Baptists are fully committed to this position.

Now Pedobaptists, our own members and the thinking world, have seen and felt that it is not true that immersion is the **only** or the main thing that hinders Baptists from inviting all other denominations to our table, else our **professions** are insincere, and our practice wrong and inconsistent.

The New York *Independent*, a standard Pedobaptist journal, has recently made a howl of this openly, and greatly to our damage. The editor says:

"When remonstrated with for their 'Close Communion,' our Baptist friends offer the following defense: 'We are no more **close** than others,' say they. 'All churches practice Close Communion so far as to invite to the table none but the baptized. We differ from others only in not regarding sprinkling as baptism. They will Commune with us, because they regard us as baptized; we do not Commune with them, because we do not regard them as baptized. We are **close** in our definition of baptism; but in regard to the Communion we are no more close than others. If you Commune only with these whom you consider to have been baptized, why do you blame us for communing only with those whom we regard as having been baptized?'"

"But this defense (whatever its value in part) does not cover the whole case. Here are the Free-will Baptists and the Adventists, all of whom have been immersed. Here are many in Methodist and not a few in other congregations who were immersed on being converted and joining the church. Here are persons, once members of Baptist churches, and immersed, of course, who, having removed to places where there was no Baptist meeting, or for other reasons in no way impeaching their Christian character, have become members of other churches. Do Baptist churches invite these to the Communion table—these whom Baptists, as well as others, acknowledge to have been baptized? By no means. The general form of invitation to Communion in Baptist churches is to 'members of sister churches of **our own faith and order.**' In other words, though one be a Christian, and an **immersed** Christian, they will not welcome him to the Lord's table unless he be a member of a regular Baptist church! Call you this being 'no more close than others?' Other churches invite to the Communion all Christians whom they regard as baptized. The Baptists are the only ones who narrow down the invitation to members of their own denomination."

In addition to the above, this editor urges the fact that all our orderly churches exclude those of their own members who persist in going to the Communion tables of Pedobaptists, Campbellites, and do not permit those to return to our tables after they have joined other

¹All the above works, save Gardner's, are published by the American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia.

organizations. We can not say that these have not been scripturally baptized, for they received immersion at our hands.

Now, it is evident in these cases, as in the case of Free-will Baptists, Adventists, Campbellites, and Mormons, and the tens of thousands of immersed Pedobaptists who do not practice or believe in infant baptism – if the lack of immersion is, in fact, the only or the essential bar, then, to be consistent, we should invite all these to commune with us, which would be an open communion upon a pretty large scale. So strongly have some of our leading ministers felt the pressure of their own argument; *i.e.*, that immersion was the real barrier, that they have been seriously impressed that it was their duty to invite all **immersed Christians** of all denominations to their tables. As for the matter of church government being a bar, as suggested by Prof. Gardner, he could not shut out Congregationalists, Adventists, Universalists, or Campbellites, since all these sects have Democratic governments like our own!

The matter of the **act** of baptism is, in my opinion, the very least thing that separates us from other denominations. If effusion was discontinued today, and the immersion of professed believers adopted in its place, the same measureless distance would stretch between us—the teachings of the whole word of God upon this subject. Nor would the adoption of the Baptist form of church government lessen in any conceivable degree this distance. I trust that, after this showing, this old argument which would effectually drive us into a limited open communion, will never be put forward again by any intelligent Baptists; and I trust that it has been said for the last time that our Communion is no closer than that of others, because it is, and it should be; for Methodists invite all the professedly unregenerate, openly ungodly, to come to the Lord's table as well as to baptism, as a means of grace, and teach that, in observing it, they may hope to obtain the pardon of sin and regeneration and salvation.²

A Baptist pastor in the State of New York, discarding the old reason for not inviting immersed Christians of other denominations, proposes four new and different ones, while the one **real** and **scriptural** reasons he has left untouched. I give them here in support of my position, that the lack of Christian baptism is by no means the **only**, or the **essential**, or the great reason why Baptists can not invite Pedobaptists, Campbellites, Hard-shell, and Soft-shell (Free-will) Baptists to their Communion table:

“1. He might [should he invite all immersed Christians to the table] reasonably expect to see devout Universalists, and members of other denominations, whose views of doctrine no evangelical church fellowship, availing themselves of it, and appearing at the Lord's table on his invitation.

“2. The excluded members of his own church and of other Baptist churches, believing themselves to be regenerated, and knowing themselves to be baptized, would be free to come to the Lord's Supper under such an invitation; and thus the force of church discipline would be greatly weakened.

“3. Such an invitation is a weakening of what seems to be the least guarded point of the Baptist defenses. It is the first question asked by an inquirer, it is the first objection raised by an opponent. It is the first step to mixed communion, which inevitably leads to mixed membership, and that ultimately to the neglect of the ordinance of baptism, and to the unscriptural observance of the Lord's Supper. The sooner Baptist pastors learn to yield no point of our defenses the better for them, for their influence and for the cause. If the camel once gets his head into any man's tent, he will be very sure to thrust in his body also.

²How much more scriptural, reasonable, and satisfactory for Baptists to say this supper is a church ordinance, like voting; and, therefore, only members of this church have a scriptural right to celebrate it with this church. We invite no other Baptist church.

“4. Such an invitation includes a baptized member of a Pedobaptist church. And the Baptist pastor is not authorized by the word of God to invite to the Lord’s table such an one, because he belongs to and supports an organized system of disobedience to Christ, so far as his ordinances are concerned. He is a baptized member of an unbaptized ‘church’ [if such a thing could be.] Although he has in one instance obeyed the command of Christ by being himself baptized, yet the whole drift and influence of his life is given to uphold an unscriptural error, and it is a correct maxim which says that ‘he who encourages wrong-doing is equally guilty with the wrong-doer.’ Such a member of a Pedobaptists church, by his practice and example, does all in his power to give to the human devices of infant sprinkling and adult sprinkling equal validity with an ordinance of Christ; and by such disorderly walk he disqualified himself for scriptural communion.”

The great scriptural reason has not yet been suggested.

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