

A

FAMILIAR DIALOGUE.

BETWEEN

PETER AND BENJAMIN,

ON THE SUBJECT OF

CLOSE COMMUNION.

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BY DELTA.

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*Eighth Edition.*

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## FAMILIAR DIALOGUE.

*Peter.* Good morning, Benjamin; whither are you going so early?

*Benjamin.* I am going to the Baptist Prayer Meeting.

*P.* Then you attend the *Baptist* Meeting, do you?

*B.* I do. I am a member of the Baptist Church—I go to the Baptist Meeting from a conviction of duty; and I esteem it a great privilege.

*P.* I will go with you this morning, because I wish to have a little conversation with you on the peculiarities of your denomination.

*B.* You shall be welcome to a seat with me, and on the way I will explain to you as well as I can, the reasons for what you call our peculiarities.

*P.* Well, I must tell you that I have read and thought much of late on the ground of our differences, and with respect to the mode and subjects of baptism, I have come to the settled conclusion, that you have the best of the argument. I have satisfied myself that the original word *Baptizo*, signifies to immerse.

*B.* Can you read Greek?

*P.* No. But I find by all history that the Greeks, who certainly understand their own language, have from the beginning, until this day, practised immersion. Their practice is a very satisfactory comment on the meaning of the word. Besides, I have read the ample concessions of more than eighty Pedobaptist writers, that this is the meaning of the original word, and that immersion was practised by the apostles and by succeeding Christians for thirteen hundred years from the commencement of the Christian era. As late as 1643, in the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, sprinkling was substituted for immersion by a majority of one—25 voted for sprinkling, 24 for immersion. This small majority was obtained by the earnest request of Dr. Lightfoot, who had acquired great influence in that Assembly. Among the concessions of *Presbyterians*, I find the Rev. Professor Campbell, D. D. of Scotland, confessedly the most learned Greek scholar and biblical critic of modern

times, says—"The word, both in sacred authors and in classical, signifies, *to dip, to plunge, to immerse*, and was rendered by Tertullian, the oldest of the Latin fathers, *tingere*, the term used for dying cloth, which was by *immersion*. It is *always* construed suitably to this meaning." Notes on Mat. iii. 11.

B. Have you found any thing in the *Bible* which seems to support the statement that immersion was the practice of the primitive disciples?

P. Yes. I perceive that they "*baptized in Jordan*," and other places where there was "much water,"—and the phraseology employed in describing the act of baptism, such as "Jesus when he was baptized came *up straightway out of the water*;" Philip and the Eunuch "*went down both into the water*;" &c. affords strong evidence that immersion was the act performed in the water. Then again, the early believers in Christ are said to have been "*buried with him by baptism*." The figurative use of the word baptism, in the expression of Christ, also, relating to his sufferings, seems very conclusive, "I have a *baptism* to be *baptized* with." I was so struck with this expression, that I turned to the commentary of Dr. Doddridge, a pious and learned Pedobaptist minister, to see what he would say, and to ascertain whether the expression could be applied to a small degree, a mere *sprinkling* of sufferings. But I found he gave the meaning which seemed to me to appear on the very face of the passage.

B. Will you repeat his paraphrase?

P. With pleasure. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, i. e. I shall shortly be *bathed*, as it were, in blood, and *plunged* in the most *overwhelming* distress." And when I hear my brethren pray, as they often do, "May we be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost," I cannot but think that they attach a similar meaning to the use of the word, and intend by the petition to pray, May we be *deeply* and *thoroughly* imbued with divine influences.

B. Some of the passages which you have quoted relate to John's Baptism. Have you never heard the objection that John's Baptism was not Christian Baptism?

P. Yes. But if the baptism to which *Christ* himself submitted was not *Christian*; especially when he said in reference to it, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," or as Campbell renders it, "to *ratify* every institution," I know not what can deserve the name. Have you any additional reasons for considering John's baptism *Christian*?

B. Yes. Mark (i. 1.) calls his ministry the "*beginning* of the gospel," &c. Dr. Scott in his notes on this passage gives my views of its import. "This was in fact *the beginning* of the gospel, the *Introduction of the New Testament Dispensation.*"

Luke (xvi. 16.) says, "The law and the prophets were *until John,*" &c. Those who object to John's Baptism being under the New Dispensation, say that this Dispensation did not commence until *after the resurrection of Christ*; but this you perceive would throw back the Lord's Supper into the Old Dispensation, for it was instituted *before his death.*

P. I do; but I have been a little puzzled with the account given in Acts xix. 1—6, respecting the disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus. Do you think they were re-baptized?

B. By no means, and I think I can relieve your mind in a few words. I remark, in the first place that, these disciples were believers, and must have experienced the ordinary influences of the Holy Ghost. The inquiry of Paul related to the *special miraculous gifts* of the Holy Ghost; these gifts after suitable inquiries and explanations were conferred. Luke is considered the writer of the Acts. I will now read the verses, first naming the speakers.

Paul. Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?

Disciples. We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

Paul. Unto what then were ye baptized?

Disciples. Unto John's baptism.

Paul. John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the *people* that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they (i. e. the *people* to whom John preached) heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Luke. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake *with tongues and prophesied.*

P. I am satisfied, and I fear, after all, that the reason for objecting to John's Baptism is to be found in the overpowering evidence that it was immersion.

B. Have you not heard some startling objections to the *possibility* of immersion in certain cases mentioned in the Bible?

P. Yes. My minister said the other day, "That it seemed to him improbable, if not quite impossible, that 3,000 were immersed on the day of Pentecost," and that it was not likely that the Jailer and his household "the same hour of

the night" went out to some river to be baptized, especially as the apostles refused the next day to go out until they were honourably released.

B. And how did you dispose of these objections?

P. With regard to the first, I remarked to him, that Peter was preaching at the third hour, (9 o'clock in the A. M.) and his sermon, one would judge from reading the 2d of Acts, must have been ended before 11 o'clock; and as there were twelve apostles and "other seventy" administrators, I proved to him by *simple division* of 3,000 by 82, that there was less than 37 candidates a piece. I also referred him to the fact, that a Baptist minister in Jamaica not long since immersed 129 in one day; another in Troy, 20 in nine minutes.

With regard to the second objection, I replied, that though the apostles would not be released from the care of the jailor without an honourable legal discharge, yet under the care of that jailor they might go out to administer baptism. But there is no necessity for supposing that they did go out, as the jailor, before his conversion, "brought them out of the inner prison" into the outer court, and every one acquainted with the structure of an oriental prison, knows that in that court, there were bathing fountains, in which prisoners were every day required to bathe. He and his family, I believe, were baptized in a font resembling a Baptistery.

B. Really on baptism you reason like a Baptist. And are you equally convinced that believers are the only proper subjects of baptism?

P. Yes. I have been so for nearly two years. I have told my minister and some of the private members of our church, that it seems to me strange that they can doubt that penitents or believers are the only subjects of baptism, when they read such passages as the following:

Mark xvi. 16, "He that *believeth*, and is baptized, shall be saved."

Acts ii. 38, "*Repent* and be baptized every one of you."  
Acts viii. 12. "When they *believed* Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were *baptized*, both men and women."  
Acts viii. 36, 37. "The eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth *hinder* me to be baptized? And Philip said, *If thou believest* with all thine heart, thou mayest."

Acts xviii. 8. "Many of the Corinthians hearing, *believed*, and were baptized."

B. But you know that they endeavour to find evidence in favour of infant baptism from an expression of Christ, in re-

ference to children—from household baptism—and from circumcision.

*P.* Yes, I know they do. But though Jesus said, "Suffer little children to come unto me," &c. yet John (iv. 2.) says, "Jesus himself *baptized not.*" Of the household of Stephanus, Paul says, (1 Cor. xvi. 15.) "It is the first *fruits of the saints.*" Paul preached the word of the Lord *to all that were in the house* of the jailer, and it is said (Acts 16.) that he believed in God, and rejoiced in God with *all his house.*" There is no evidence that there were any children in the household of Lydia, and from the last clause of the chapter that gives us an account of her conversion and baptism, it appears that her household consisted of *brethren*—probably the servants that attended her on her trading journey. And have you never found any whole households that "believed and were baptized," in your denomination?

*B.* Yes, several. I called on a family of this kind not long since, in the town of Willington, Con. The father and mother, and seven children and an apprentice, had all become members of the Baptist Church in that town. Such instances are not unfrequent among us. I believe you did not express your views of the argument drawn from circumcision.

*P.* I can see no analogy between the circumcision of a *male* Hebrew child, and the baptism of a *female* child of a believing Gentile. And if baptism came in the room of circumcision, I wonder the change was not thought of by the apostolical council to whom the dissension about circumcision was referred. It would have been easy for them to remove the difficulty by simply saying, "Baptism came in the room of circumcision, and is to be observed by believers in its stead;" but they "gave no such commandment." See Acts xv. 1—31.

*B.* You said you wished to converse with me on the *peculiarities* of the Baptist denomination. But thus far your sentiments and mine are the same. I can see no difference between us.

*P.* You will find there is one point at least on which we shall widely differ.

*B.* I would now ask you what that is, but the time for meeting has come; we will now close our conversation, and if you please, resume it again this evening at my house.

*P.* Very well. I will call at 8 o'clock.

## SECOND INTERVIEW.

*B.* Good evening, brother Peter, I am glad to see you. Be seated. Ever since our conversation this morning, I have been trying to imagine what you could mean by that "one point on which we shall widely differ."

*P.* There is one thing, and one only, which prevents me from being a Baptist; but that one thing seems to be an insuperable barrier.

*B.* Do tell me what it is.

*P.* O your close communion!

*B.* Do we not commune just as you do? The only difference I can see is, we celebrate the Lord's Supper at the close of the day instead of the morning, because we think this season better adapted to the idea of a *Supper*. What do you mean by close communion?

*P.* You do not receive Christians of other denominations, and this is a great stumbling block to me.

*B.* Let me ask you one question, and the answer, I have reason to anticipate, will show that our difference of opinion on this point, is not so wide as you imagine. Do you believe that baptism is a prerequisite to communion?

*P.* Certainly; though I confess I should like to hear some of your reasons for considering it so.

*B.* I will give them with pleasure.

Christ commissioned his disciples to "Go teach (disciple) all nations,"—admitting them immediately to the Lord's Supper? No; "*Baptizing* them," &c. They were then to teach them all things which he had commanded. One of the commands afterwards to be taught the baptized disciples was, "Do this in remembrance of me." According to this commission, when Ananias became satisfied that Saul had become a disciple, he said to him, "Arise,"—and what next? Come to the table of the Lord? No. "Arise, and be *baptized*." He afterwards "assayed to join himself to the disciples." We have another example in the manner of building the Church at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. By consulting the second chapter of Acts, you will find that the joyful converts were first *baptized*, and then continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in "*breaking of bread*," &c. Baptism seems to have been considered by all denominations (that have held to external ordinances at all) as a rite which should precede the reception of the Lord's Supper.

Justin Martyr says, "This food is called by us the Eu-



charist; of which it is *not lawful* for any to partake but such as believe the things taught by us to be true, and have been *baptized*." Dr. Wall informs us, that "*No Church* ever gave the communion to *any* persons before they were baptized. Among all the absurdities that ever were held, none ever maintained *that*, that any person should partake of the communion, *before* he was baptized." Dr. Doddridge tells us, "It is certain that as far as our knowledge of primitive antiquity reaches, *no unbaptized person* received the Lord's Supper." Again: "*How excellent soever* any man's character is, he must be *baptized, before* he can be looked upon as completely a member of the Church of Christ." Mr. Baxter remarks:—"What man dare to go in a way which hath neither precept nor example to warrant it, from a way that hath a full current of both? Yet they that will admit members into the visible Church *without baptism* do so." Equally to the point is the assertion of Dr. Dwight, late President of Yale College. He says:—"It is an *indispensable qualification* for this ordinance, that the candidate for communion be a member of the visible church of Christ, in full standing. By this I intend,—that he should be a person of piety; that he should have made a public profession of religion; *and that he should have been baptized*." And how is it in your church? Does your minister require candidates for admission first to be baptized?

P. I never knew him to receive any who had not been baptized according to his views of baptism. Indeed, I do not know of a Presbyterian or Congregational Church in the country, that would admit persons to the communion *whom they considered unbaptized*. I never supposed that this ever could consistently be dispensed with in the churches; but I confess I never saw before so strong reasons in favour of first requiring baptism of candidates for admission to church privileges.

B. Well. You see that the principle on which ~~we~~ and all other denominations act in this instance, is precisely the same. Your minister believes that sprinkling, pouring, and plunging, are all equally valid baptism; and therefore invites such as are sprinkled, poured, and plunged, to the communion. My minister believes with Paul, that there is but "*one baptism*," and that is immersion; he therefore can invite only the immersed. There is no close *communion* here; if there is any closeness, it is close *baptism*. The Baptists and all other Christians refuse to commune with the unbaptized. The question then is, What is baptism? If we agree in settling this question, then there is no difference between

us. And as they all believe that immersion is valid baptism, I have often wondered that they do not practise immersion instead of sprinkling, and end the strife. They have no doubt that we are baptized; if they had, they would not receive us. We do conscientiously doubt the validity of sprinkling for baptism. The sacrifice on their part to produce conformity would be nothing; on ours, it would be the sacrifice of honest, conscientious principle.

*P.* I now see that your Churches and ours act on the same principle respecting the admission of persons to the sacrament, but still I wish to name a few objections to your practice, which have existed in my mind, and which, I freely acknowledge, still have some influence upon me.

*B.* Go on, my brother, let me know all your difficulties on this subject.

*P.* You know the communion table is called the Lord's table; how then can you refuse to admit the Lord's people?

*B.* The very fact that it is the Lord's table, furnishes the answer. If it were *our* table, we would invite whom we pleased; but as it is the Lord's table, we must consult his word, and extend the invitation to those only, who, by the Saviour's commission, and the apostolic examples, we find allowed to partake—viz. baptized believers.

And I think I can convince you that your minister does not invite all the Lord's people to come to the Lord's table.

*P.* O, he says he "can freely receive all that Christ has received."

*B.* But does not Mr. Goodman belong to his congregation, and does not your minister believe that he has a name descriptive of his character?

*P.* Yes. I have often heard him regret that a man so eminently pious and exemplary should remain year after year, out of the Church, where his influence is so much needed.

*B.* Mr. Goodman attends meeting on communion days, I suppose.

*P.* Yes; no man is more constant in his attendance on public worship.

*B.* And is he invited to come to the Lord's table?

*P.* O no. He was never baptized. He never joined the Church.

*B.* And I have been told that within two months, many in your congregation have experienced religion.

*P.* Yes. A large number indeed have become pious.

*B.* Any of them before the last communion?

*P.* Yes; more than forty.

*B.* Is your minister satisfied with their piety?

*P.* I heard him say that he was never better satisfied with young converts.

*B.* Did he invite them to the Lord's table?

*P.* O no.

*B.* What! debar Mr. Goodman and more than forty others of the Lord's people from the Lord's table? Surely he is on the Baptist ground. And I have been told, too, that his mother and one sister are among the converts. How could he refuse to commune with his own mother and sister?

*P.* None of these had been admitted to membership, and I am now convinced that piety alone, even when found in our dearest earthly connexions, does not give them a right to the Lord's table. The Lord's people must, if they come at all, come in the Lord's way. But what do you say to them, provided they seem to be *sincere*?

*B.* We tell them that sincerity is no proof of correctness. Saul of Tarsus was sincere before his conversion. He thought he was doing God service when he was persecuting the Church; and John Newton was sincere after his conversion, in continuing in the slave trade, until his eyes were opened to see the evil of this abominable traffic. But the sincerity of these men did not prove their conduct to be justifiable. But if sincerity be admitted as an evidence of correctness, then we claim to be correct ourselves; for we are as sincere in refusing to commune with those whom we consider unbaptized, as they are in refusing to commune with those whom *they* consider unbaptized.

*P.* I have another question which I presume you have often heard, and which has been a source of some perplexity to me—"If we cannot commune together on earth, how can we in heaven?"

*B.* "We plead for a communion on earth, with Christians of every sect, which shall bear a resemblance to that of heaven. We do not suppose that the communion of the 'just made perfect,' consists in partaking of the symbols of Christ's death, but in high and spiritual intercourse; in mutual expressions of admiration and gratitude, while reviewing the dispensations of providence and grace towards them in this world; in mingled songs of praise to Him who hath washed them from their sins in his own blood; and in exalted converse concerning the glorious scenes which the revolutions of eternity will be continually unfolding to their delighted gaze. In such communion as this, although of a

more humble character, we would be glad to participate with *all good men.*"

*P.* Really, my brother Benjamin, you have answered my questions in a clear and satisfactory manner. I am convinced of the correctness of your principles, and the consistency of your conduct. I see that the Baptist Churches act in accordance with apostolic usage, and with the universal practice of Presbyterian and other Churches, in requiring baptism as a prerequisite to communion. I have for some time past been convinced that immersion is the only baptism, and believers the only subjects of the ordinance; and I am now more fully confirmed in the opinion that baptism should *in every instance precede communion.* But what shall I do? My parents and many other relatives belong to the Presbyterian Church. I receive much patronage in my business from the wealthy and respectable part of that Church; I shall give offence by dissolving my connexion, and you will admit that baptism is not really essential to salvation.

*B.* I will admit that baptism is not essential to salvation. The Baptists are so far from believing this, that they consider no one entitled to baptism, who is not in a state of salvation. Faith is essential to salvation; immersion is as essential to baptism as roundness to a ball; and baptism is an essential prerequisite to communion. Is not baptism as essential as communion? Are not both *external* ordinances? The Jews were required on one occasion to offer a *red heifer.* Had they a right to say—the colour is *non-essential?* A white one will answer as well? Was not *redness* essential to obedience? But, my dear brother, will you do nothing for the honour of Christ, which is not absolutely essential to your salvation? "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" Are you not to obey all his commands, and to imitate his examples, even though he might possibly save you if you were to neglect some of them? You must forsake father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife, and houses, and lands, if you would follow Christ, and be a consistent disciple.

Your mind is confessedly enlightened with regard to the Institutions established in beautiful order and simplicity by Him who evinced his love to you, by freely giving his blood as a ransom for your soul.

"If ye *know* these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them."

*P.* The love of Christ constraineth me: and, fearless of consequences, I will make haste, and delay not to keep his commandments.