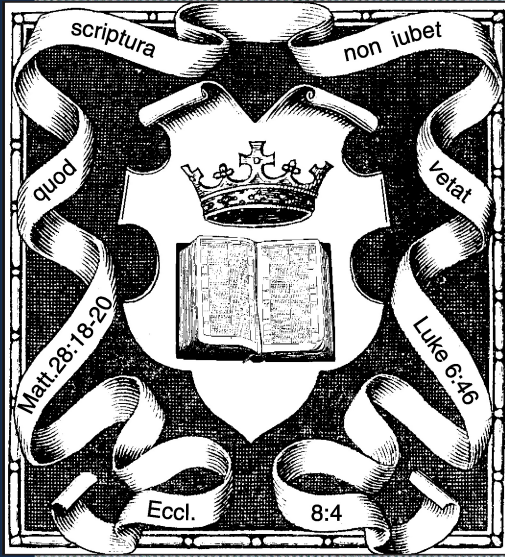


The Baptist Distinctives Series
Number 6



Baptism In Its Mode and Subjects

Alexander Carson



Quod scriptura, non iubet vetat

The Latin translates, “What is not commanded in scripture, is forbidden:”

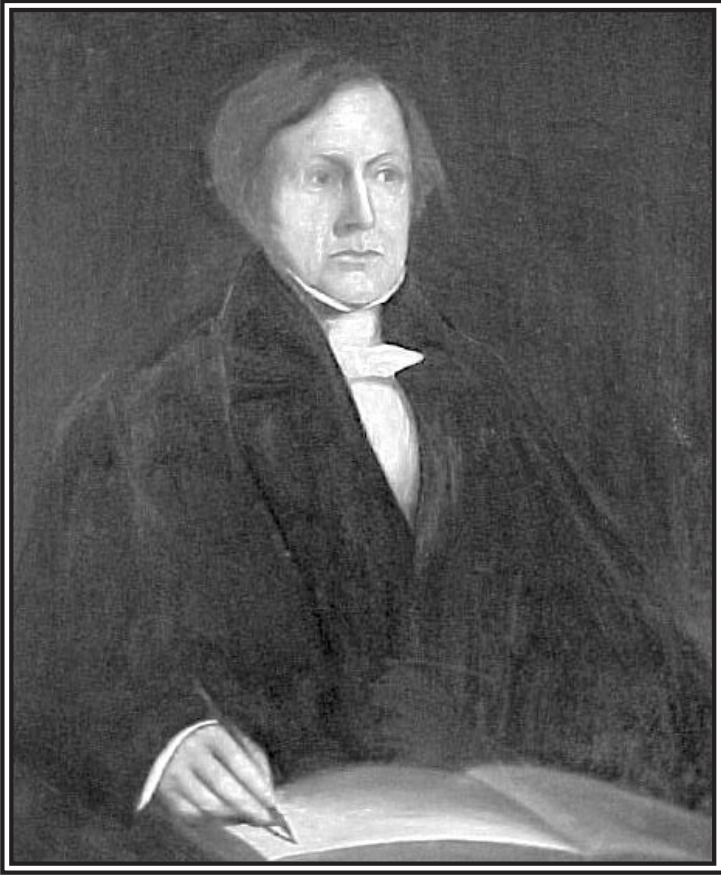
On the Cover: Baptists rejoice to hold in common with other evangelicals the main principles of the orthodox Christian faith. However, there are points of difference and these differences are significant. In fact, because these differences arise out of God’s revealed will, they are of vital importance. Hence, the barriers of separation between Baptists and others can hardly be considered a trifling matter. To suppose that Baptists are kept apart solely by their views on Baptism or the Lord’s Supper is a regrettable misunderstanding. Baptists hold views which distinguish them from Catholics, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, and Presbyterians, and the differences are so great as not only to justify, but to demand, the separate denominational existence of Baptists. Some people think Baptists ought not teach and emphasize their differences but as E.J. Forrester stated in 1893, “Any denomination that has views which justify its separate existence, is bound to promulgate those views. If those views are of sufficient importance to justify a separate existence, they are important enough to create a duty for their promulgation ... the very same reasons which justify the separate existence of any denomination make it the duty of that denomination to teach the distinctive doctrines upon which its separate existence rests.” If Baptists have a right to a separate denominational life, it is their duty to propagate their distinctive principles, without which their separate life cannot be justified or maintained.

Many among today’s professing Baptists have an agenda to revise the Baptist distinctives and redefine what it means to be a Baptist. Others don’t understand why it even matters. The books being reproduced in the *Baptist Distinctives Series* are republished in order that Baptists from the past may state, explain and defend the primary Baptist distinctives as they understood them. It is hoped that this Series will provide a more thorough historical perspective on what it means to be distinctively Baptist.

The Lord Jesus Christ asked, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). The immediate context surrounding this question explains what it means to be a true disciple of Christ. Addressing the same issue, Christ’s question is meant to show that a confession of discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ is inconsistent and untrue if it is not accompanied with a corresponding submission to His authoritative commands. Christ’s question teaches us that a true recognition of His authority as Lord inevitably includes a submission to the authority of His Word. Hence, with this question Christ has made it forever impossible to separate His authority as King from the authority of His Word. These two principles—the authority of Christ as King and the authority of His Word—are the two most fundamental Baptist distinctives. The first gives rise to the second and out of these two all the other Baptist distinctives emanate. As F.M. Jans wrote in 1894, “Loyalty to Christ as King, manifesting itself in a constant and unswerving obedience to His will as revealed in His written Word, is the real source of all the Baptist distinctives.” In the search for the *primary* Baptist distinctive many have settled on the Lordship of Christ as the most basic distinctive. Strangely, in doing this, some have attempted to separate Christ’s Lordship from the authority of Scripture, as if you could embrace Christ’s authority without submitting to what He commanded. However, while Christ’s Lordship and Kingly authority can be isolated and considered essentially for discussion’s sake, we see from Christ’s own words in Luke 6:46 that His Lordship is really inseparable from His Word and, with regard to real Christian discipleship, there can be no practical submission to the one without a practical submission to the other.

In the symbol above the Kingly Crown and the Open Bible represent the inseparable truths of Christ’s Kingly and Biblical authority. The Crown and Bible graphics are supplemented by three Bible verses (Ecclesiastes 8:4, Matthew 28:18-20, and Luke 6:46) that reiterate and reinforce the inextricable connection between the authority of Christ as King and the authority of His Word. The truths symbolized by these components are further emphasized by the Latin quotation - *quod scriptura, non iubet vetat*— *i.e.*, “What is not commanded in scripture, is forbidden.” This Latin quote has been considered historically as a summary statement of the regulative principle of Scripture. Together these various symbolic components converge to exhibit the two most foundational Baptist Distinctives out of which all the other Baptist Distinctives arise. Consequently, we have chosen this composite symbol as a logo to represent the primary truths set forth in the *Baptist Distinctives Series*.

BAPTISM
IN ITS
MODE AND SUBJECTS



ALEXANDER CARSON, LL. D.
1776-1844

BAPTISM
IN ITS
MODE AND SUBJECTS.

BY
ALEXANDER CARSON, L.L.D.,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL



With a Biographical Sketch of the Author
by
John Franklin Jones



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THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

ISBN# 1579787878

PREFACE.

NOTHING can be farther from the intention of the following Work, than to widen the breach among Christians of different denominations, or to minister to the increase of a sectarian spirit. There are two extremes which I wish to avoid—on the one hand, a spirit of liberalism that supposes the Christian his own master, and hesitates not to sacrifice the commandments of God to the courtesies of religious intercourse—on the other, that sort of dogmatism that finds all excellence in its own party, and is reluctant to acknowledge the people of the Lord in any denomination but its own. Liberality of sentiment is not a phrase which I admit into my religious vocabulary; for though I love and acknowledge all who love the Lord Jesus, I hold myself as much under the law of God in embracing all the children of God, as in forming the articles of my creed. My recognition of all Christians I ground on the authority of Jesus. To set at nought the weakest of Christ's little ones, I call not illiberal, but unchristian. To disown those whom Christ acknowledges, is antichristian disobedience to Christ. But while I gladly admit, that many who differ from me with respect to baptism, are among the excellent of the earth, I cannot, out of compliment to them, abstain from vindicating this ordinance of Christ. This would show greater deference to man than to God. "Every plant," says Jesus, "that my heavenly Father hath not planted, must be plucked up." To permit the traditions of men to pass for the ordinances of God, is injurious to the edification of Christians, and disrespectful to Christ.

Some are diverted from the examination of this subject, by considering it as a thing of small moment, and that time is better spent in schemes of general usefulness. That baptism is a thing of small moment, is an opinion that is not likely to have been suggested by the accounts of it in the Scriptures. It is an ordinance that strikingly represents the truth that saves the soul ; and is peremptorily enjoined on all who believe. But were it the very least of all the commandments of Jesus, it demands attention and obedience at the hazard of life itself. Nothing that Christ has appointed, can be innocently neglected. To suppose that schemes of general usefulness ought to take the place of the commandments of God, is a direct affront to the wisdom and power of Jehovah. Saul alleged that he had substantially obeyed the word of the Lord, though he spared Agag, the king of Amalek, and a part of the spoil for a burnt-offering ; but the answer of the prophet ought for ever to deter from the exercise of a discretionary power, with respect to the commandments of God : “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord ? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice ; and to hearken, than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry : Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.”

Many seem alarmed at controversy, and shrink from it as opposed to the spirit of the Gospel. It is, no doubt, a grievous thing, that controversy should be necessary ; but as long as error exists, it is impossible to avoid controversy, except we value peace more than truth. Can we forget that the whole life of Christ and his apostles was a scene of never-ending controversy ? He who was love itself, contended constantly against the errors of his time. There is not a truth or an ordinance of the Gospel that Christians can hold without opposition. From the manner of revelation, it seems evidently the design of God to manifest what is in man ; and to leave an opening to discover the opposition to his wisdom in the minds even of his own people, as far as it exists.

The arguments that are opposed to the truth on any subject of revelation, have their effect on the mind, not from their intrinsic weight, but from their adaptation to the corruptions of the heart. We yield to them, because what they are designed to establish is more agreeable than that to which they are opposed. Of this we have a remarkable example in the disobedient prophet at Bethel. When he was sent to denounce the judgments of the Lord against Jeroboam's altar, he was forbidden to eat or drink in the place. Yet, after refusing the hospitality of the king, he suffered himself to be deceived by another prophet. "Come home with me, and eat bread. And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee; neither will I eat bread, nor drink water with thee in this place. For it was said to me, by the word of the Lord, Thou shalt not eat bread, nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest. He said unto him, I am a prophet also, as thou art, and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread, and drink water. But he lied unto him. So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drink water." Many things might be plausibly said to justify or excuse this unhappy man. But the Lord did not excuse him. "Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread, and drunk water, in the place of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers." It behoves those who change the mode and the subjects of baptism, to consider this awful example. If Christ has commanded his disciples to be baptized on their belief of the truth, who can change it into the baptism of infants? If he has commanded them to be immersed, who can change it into pouring or sprinkling?

In stating the evidence on my own side, and in refuting the arguments of my opponents, I have from first to last proceeded as if I were on oath. I have never allowed myself to use artifice, or

to affect to despise an argument which I found myself unable to answer. This is a resource in many controversialists, that is both disingenuous and mean. I have not used one argument to convince others, that has not with myself all the weight which I wish it to have with them. I am not conscious of forcing one line in the word of God. I have no temporal interest to serve, by establishing my views of baptism. Interest and reputation are both on the other side.

False first principles, and false canons of interpretation, lie at the bottom of most false reasoning and false criticism. This is remarkably verified in the reasonings and criticisms of my opponents, which I have examined. The reader will find innumerable instances in which I substantiate this charge. Criticism can never be a science until it founds on canons that are self-evident. When controversy is conducted on both sides in this way, truth will soon be established. My dissertation on the import of the word *baptizo*, I submit with confidence to the judgment of the really learned. If I have not settled that controversy, there is not truth in axioms.

I earnestly entreat my brethren to consider the subject with patience and impartiality. Though it may injure the temporal interest of many of them, yet there is a hundred-fold advantage in following the Lord. It would give me the greatest pleasure in being the means of leading others to correct views on this subject. But I know human nature too well to be sanguine. Something more than the strength of argument is necessary to bring even Christians to understand the will of their Lord. However, should I not make a single convert, I shall not be disappointed. My first desire is to approve myself to my Lord. If I please him, I hope I shall be enabled to bear not only the enmity of the world, but the disapprobation of Christian brethren. I expect my reward at his appearing. The motto I wish to be engraven on my heart is, "Occupy till I come."

INTRODUCTION.

As in the baptismal controversy I have taken the side opposed to interest and popularity, I could have no temptation to become a Baptist. Knowing the strength of prejudice on the other side, and the odium attached to truth on this question, I have, from the commencement of the examination of the subject, acted with the utmost caution and deliberation. I have no pleasure in reproach or persecution. To me, it was a very serious sacrifice to change my views on this question. All the other points in which I differ from the dominant sects of this country, do not give so much offence to the world, as does the difference on the subject of Baptism. I anticipated the end, I counted the cost, and I am daily paying the instalments. In the present work, I have, at great length, laid the evidence before my readers, both in proof and refutation. In both I have acted with integrity and candour. I have, in every line, written as in the sight of God, and with the full impression that I shall give account. It is no light matter to attempt to influence the views and conduct of the Lord's people as to any part of his will. Nothing I wish more to avoid than, in the day of God, to be found to have led his people away from his truth and ordinances. I have not used an argument which has not the weight on my own mind, which I wish it to have on my reader's. I have not overlooked a single objection from a conviction of its difficulty, nor given it an evasive or sophistical answer. If truth is my client, I shall not affront her by an unworthy defence. I despise sophistry on all subjects: when employed on the work of God, I loathe and abhor it. I am not indifferent to the approbation of honest and

sound-minded men; to these I confidently appeal. But my ambition is, to be recognised by Jesus as the defender of his truth, "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

I have thought it necessary to premise some observations on the nature of the burden of proof. If they are sound, they will be of immense importance on any subject. It is a thing on which controversialists appear to be universally mistaken. As it is essential to the manifestation of truth, it is not possible that it can be either optional or conventional.

The nature of the testimony of the Fathers, with respect to the meaning of the word which designates the ordinance, I have pointed out. It is only as they testify as to the meaning of the word in the time of the Apostles, that they can be called in as witnesses. The word might have received any number of secondary meanings after this period, without affecting the question at issue. To speak of meaning conferred by progress of ideas after the institution of the ordinance, as being applicable for proof on this subject, is at the utmost verge of absurdity.

In order to make the work more agreeable and useful to the English reader, I have not printed a single Greek word: and there is hardly a criticism which men of a sound mind without learning may not understand and estimate. My canons and my criticisms generally apply to all languages, and require nothing in the reader but patience and a sound judgment. The only thing which I regret in following this plan is, that it prevents me from using much valuable evidence supplied to me by my friends from the testimony of modern Greek, &c.

To a highly respectable individual who sent me his views against the *perpetuity* of Baptism, I reply, that I had originally intended to treat on this point, but, on consideration, I found that it did not lie before me, and would require to be treated in a separate work.

I give a similar answer to many other friends who have suggested points which they wished to be handled. I wish to

avoid anything but what is essential to my main object. A writer who attempts to do every thing at once, will do nothing well.

Some of my antagonists speak as if I were a most bigoted and intolerant Baptist. In replying to them, I have taken no notice of this. I despise misrepresentation; in the end it can do no injury. So far from fostering a sectarian spirit, no one can more thoroughly abhor it than I do. It mars the progress of the truth, which with every Christian ought to be paramount to all things; it dishonours Christ and his people; and it does injury even to the cause which it is designed to favour. While I defend what I consider truth, with respect to this ordinance, I cordially embrace every lover of the Lord Jesus, and concede to him the same privilege that I take to myself. In my mind it is a heinous sin to despise the very weakest of all the children of God; and if ever Christian union was important, it is so in the present time, when all the machinations of the Prince of darkness are employed in combination to destroy the truth. I am as warm an advocate for Christian union as I am for Baptism. I am fully convinced that, if Christian union were fully understood and acted on by Christians in general, right views of Baptism would soon prevail. Among all the causes that prevent Christians from impartial and earnest inquiry, a sectarian spirit is the chief: it shuts them out from confidential intercourse with one another, and disinclines them to think of the subject.

Many seem to think that zeal for any of the things in which Christians differ, is inconsistent with zeal for Christian union. Accordingly, while some, on the one hand, from zeal for their peculiarities, are unfriendly to Christian union, others, on the other hand, from zeal for Christian union, think themselves bound to undervalue and neglect the things in which Christians differ. Nothing can be more unfounded and dishonourable to truth than this. On the contrary, the greatest zeal for a particular opinion is quite consistent with the utmost regard for Christian union. Christian union is not founded on perfect agreement with respect to all the will of God, but agreement about the truth that unites them all

in one body in Christ. No difference consistent with this, can really separate them. I press my views on my brethren : if I succeed, I do them service ; if I fail, I discharge my duty, but have no cause of complaint against them. They are not accountable to me, and it is the essence of popery to assume any authority but that of argument. In the field of battle, I strike in earnest, but even then it is the arguments, or the talents, or the harmony of my opponent, at which I aim. I never judge the heart ! I am united in heart with all who are united to Christ.

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“REASONS WHY BAPTISTS OUGHT TO TEACH THEIR DISTINCTIVE VIEWS . . . First, *it is a duty we owe to ourselves*. We must teach these views in order to be consistent in holding them. Because of these we stand apart from other Christians, in separate organizations. . . We have no right thus to stand apart unless the matters of difference have real importance; and if they are really important, we certainly ought to teach them.”

JOHN A. BROADUS

The Duty of Baptists To Teach Their Distinctive Views.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881).

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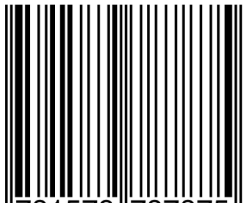
“There is something distinctive in the principles of Baptists. They differ from all other denominations; and the difference is so great as not only to justify, but to demand, their separate existence as a people . . . What distinctive mission have the Baptists, if this is not their mission? - to present the truth in love on the matters wherein they differ from Pedobaptists. What is there but this that justifies their separate denominational existence and saves them from the reproach of being schismatics? *If they have a right to denominational life, it is their duty to propagate their distinctive principles, without which that life cannot be justified or maintained.*”

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