

Intercommunion is Unscriptural

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It is objected that "should the churches return to the strict practice, many ministers who are now 'pastoring' four or five churches could not commune with the churches they serve and for which they administer the Supper."

This is not the fault of the theory, but of those churches that have no pastors. Christ ordained that each church should have a bishop, as he ordained that each wife should have one husband, and each flock a shepherd, and he also ordained that each church should support its own pastor, and if unable to do so, it should not assume church form and prerogatives.

In this case the pastor can participate with his church, for he will be a member of, and under its jurisdiction. Still there is no real difficulty in the case, when the minister is willing to act scripturally. He can administer this ordinance to the church, without exercising the rights of a member, as well as receive members into the church, and administering the other ordinance, without voting on the qualifications of the subject. He has the same right to vote, as he has to eat, with a church of which he is not a member. We often administer the Supper for churches at their request, but participate only with our own.

Christ made no exceptions to meet difficulties arising from departures from his order, and we have no right to do it. We cannot divide a principle; we must take the whole or none at all. For unless we observe the ordinances as he commanded, we do not observe them at all—they are null and void, and worse—perverted and profaned.

SCRIPTURAL OBJECTION

The only Scripture we have seen quoted to sustain the practice of intercommunion among Baptists, is Acts 20: 7. The brethren who quote this should never smile in pity upon Pedobaptists for quoting Mark 10:14 to prove Infant Baptism. All that passage lacks of being a proof text for the practice, is the substitution of the one word baptized, for "blessed," and all this passage lacks to be of any service to our brethren, is the statement that Paul and Luke did eat the Lord's Supper with the Baptist church at Troas, but it does not say it, or even intimate it. And let me here state that the practice of the apostles and first ministers, divinely commissioned to promulgate the gospel and establish churches in foreign lands, certainly should not be quoted to justify ministers, or private members, in doing the same thing.

No one is warranted to preach, and to baptize now, without having received baptism or the ordination of some church, because John the Baptist did so. No deacon can claim the right to preach and baptize, by virtue of his office, when traveling in a strange country, should a stranger demand baptism at his hands, because Philip, once a deacon, baptized the eunuch.

I insist that, could a score of passages be produced to prove that Paul, or any other apostle did "commune" with the churches he planted, it would prove nothing in support of denominational communion, so long as Paul's letters to the church at Corinth are allowed to be the law to all our churches of this age, and in which the Supper is still to be observed with "one loaf," and by one church, one body, and the church required to purge out the leaven that she may observe a pure feast.

But to return to the proof text, which proves absolutely nothing, but that the "brethren at Troas" did meet, on the first day of the week, to break the loaf. Let us read it: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples—*toon mathetoon*—came together to break bread." The disciples of every church Paul organized, doubtless observed the same custom on the first day of the week, but this is not proof that Paul always or ever partook of the Supper with them. But it is claimed that verse 11 positively declares that he did eat with this church.

To verse 11, then, we go, and how does this read?

"When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and had eaten, and had talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed."

Now the facts were, the brethren of the church came together to break bread at the close of the day, and did so, then Paul commenced to preach unto them, and continued until midnight, at which time Eutychus, falling asleep, fell out of the window from the third story, and was taken up dead. Paul went down and resuscitated him. It was after this event that the eleventh verse, above quoted, comes in.

Now, that this was not the Lord's Supper, but refreshment prepared for Paul after his six hours' speaking, and preparatory to his departure, is evident from the language itself.

1. The disciples broke the loaf on Sabbath eve, and this meal was a breakfast, eaten at one or two o'clock A. M., on the beginning of the second day of the week.
2. It states that Paul ate, not the brethren of the church. Had it been the Lord's Supper, and all had participated, the Greek participles would have been in the plural, and not in the singular as they all are, referring to this matter—*anabas, klasas, gensamenos, omilesas*. But it is claimed that *gensamenos* determines it, since it sometimes means "to taste," "eat lightly," etc.

Well, grant that the inditing Spirit did intend to inform us that Paul did not eat very heartily, but only lightly, it does not surprise us after the fatigue of preaching six hours, and the excitement of raising a man from the dead—his first miracle of this kind; still, not the church, but only Paul ate, and this settles the matter. The learned Alford translates *gensamenos*, "having made a meal," and says: "Not having tasted it—i.e., the bread which he had broken—though that is implied, usage decides for the other meaning."

Barnes says: "Had taken refreshment. As this is spoken of Paul only, it is evidently distinguished from the celebration of the Lord's Supper."

DIRECT SCRIPTURAL PROOF AGAINST INTER-CHURCH COMMUNION.

There were certain teachers that belonged to the church at Jerusalem who had a great zeal for the law, and they seemed to have made it a point to visit all the churches planted by Paul, to antagonize the doctrine he taught. And these, everywhere they went, introduced confusion into the churches, and bewitched the brethren with their Judaistic teachings. The elders and brethren at Jerusalem admitted this fact:

"Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, etc."(Acts 15:24)

How did Paul regard these brethren?

"I marvel that you are so soon removed from him who called you into another gospel, which is not another: but there be some who trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." (Gal. 1:6)

"Behold, I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing...Christ is become of none effect unto you...A little LEAVEN leaveneth the whole lump." (Gal. 5:2, 9)

The false doctrine taught by these teachers Paul called "leaven."

In warning the church at Corinth of these, and such like, he says:

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ; and no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end..." (II Cor. 11:13-16)

Again he says: "For many walk, of whom I have told you before, and I tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction."(Phil. 3: 18)

How did Paul instruct the churches to treat these brethren; associate and "commune" with them, or to avoid and withdraw, and purge them as leaven, away from their tables? Hear him:

- "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach another gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8)
- "I would they were cut off who trouble you." (Gal 5:12)
- "From such turn away." (II Tim. 3:5)
- "Withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly." (II Thess. 3:6)
- "Note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." (II Thess. 3:14)
- How about communing with such? "Purge out therefore the old leaven" (I Cor. 5:7)—i. e., all these false teachers and those who hold with them.

This to my mind settles this question of intercommunion in Paul's day. The church at Corinth could not invite all the members of the church at Jerusalem to partake of the Supper, without violating the positive instructions of Paul, for there were thousands of members, if not the majority of that church, who held with these false teachers, and supported them. (See Acts 21:22)

But not a few of such like brethren had crept into all the churches Paul had planted among the Gentiles, into the churches of Galatia; and if the church at Corinth did as our churches are wont to do, invite all members in good standing in sister churches; then all the Judaized brethren at Jerusalem, and all the false apostles—impostors—all the false and corrupt teachers, and false brethren of all Asia, might have come and sat down with their loads of leaven!

No thinking man can believe, with Paul's instructions before his eyes, that the church at Corinth did practice intercommunion with the church at Jerusalem or the churches of Galatia, and very many of the other churches of Asia.

As late as the thirteenth century the practice of each church limiting its Supper to its own membership seems to be established. This was called the aphorism of Ignatius—one altar and one bishop in each church. But not into the histories of the apostate churches, which, unfortunately, most of our histories are, may we look for primitive purity; and little do we know of those that kept the faith, save through their enemies, who generally misrepresented them. The instructions given to the New Testament churches must be our "Landmarks."

CONCLUSION

1. Intercommunion between opposing denominations holding diverse faiths, is a profanation of the Lord's Supper.
2. The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of each local church, to be observed by its own members qualified to receive it, and by none else. Therefore,
3. Intercommunion between Baptist churches is unscriptural.



Baptist Succession or Stumble Period? _____

David E. Gonnella

From *The Baptist Challenge*, May 2014

In every age since the Apostolic Age, Baptists have made the claim of exclusively being the churches of Christ and of being the spiritual descendants of the church which He founded during His earthly ministry. In this, Baptists are unique, for even the Roman Catholic Church claims to go back only as far as the apostle Peter and the Day of Pentecost.

Now I need to hasten to say that such a belief does not mean that Baptists think that they are the only ones going to heaven, as is often slanderously reported of us. I have never yet met a Baptist who believed that only Baptists would be in heaven. To the contrary, we believe that anyone who trusts in Christ for salvation is a child of God and destined for heaven, no matter what denominational label he wears, or even if he belongs to no church. It is Jesus who saves (Jn. 14:6), not membership in a church.

What Is Meant By "Baptist Succession"

When we speak of Baptist succession, we mean that since the time of Christ's earthly ministry there have appeared in every generation churches like the one He founded while He was here on earth. Further, these churches had the same basic characteristics in doctrine and practice. We believe that these churches must be related to each other, notwithstanding their different names (due to different locations, different leaders, and the slander of their enemies). We hold that the churches that have maintained New Testament purity are known by the name "Baptist" in our times, and that such churches will continue to exist until the rapture.

The Stumble Theory

Those who have set themselves against the truth of Baptist succession (both without and among Baptists) usually subscribe to one of two theories:

- (1) That in each generation there were those who "discovered" New Testament principles on their own, unrelated to any other group of persons. That is, they "stumble" on the truth.
- (2) That the New Testament model of a church was lost during the Dark Ages, and was rediscovered in the Protestant Reformation.

Now it is not reasonable to assume that any great number of people stumbled on New Testament truth generation after generation. While this does happen on occasion, it is the exception rather than the rule. When he was with us for a Bible Conference, Bro. M. L. Moser, Jr. told of a Presbyterian congregation in Mexico that concluded from the New Testament that they needed to become Baptists, and so applied to a Baptist church for baptism. But again, such is rare, and in the case of that group they sought out a New Testament church for authority rather than assuming authority to baptize themselves.

It is also not reasonable to assume that God's truth was lost for centuries until it was re-established by those whose churches are not patterned after the New Testament model.

What is reasonable is to believe that pure New Testament doctrine has been preserved in the true churches of Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 3:15) who have passed that doctrine from generation to generation (2 Tim. 2:2). It is reasonable to accept the witness of Scripture and history.

The Scriptural Foundation

Is there any Biblical reason to believe that the churches of Christ would have a continuity from generation to generation throughout this Dispensation? Yes, there certainly is. For the sake of space we will be brief and only give three evidences.

We first see a reason to believe in church succession in the promise of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church. Here He speaks not of a universal/invisible church, an idea foreign to the New Testament, but of the church as an institution, beginning with that local church He founded. What He obviously meant (if the book of Acts teaches anything) is that He had planted the first church, and from it would spring others, and from them others, throughout this age. That no matter how hard Satan fought against them, he would not cause them to cease to exist over the earth.

Also, we see the promise of Jesus given in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) to the church He founded and passed on to all who followed her. How could Jesus be with His churches "always, even unto the end of the world" if, in any generation they all ceased to exist? No, they must be here for Jesus to be with them.

Second, in the teaching of the apostle Paul, we see the truth of church succession. He wrote to the Corinthian church (a local church) about the Lord's Supper and instructed them that in eating the bread and drinking the cup, they would show forth the Lord's death "till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). How could the Lord's death be shown forth "till he come" if there was no true New Testament church on the face of the earth to observe the Lord's Supper?

The promise of the rapture was given to a local church (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

This is not to say that only church members will be raptured at the end of the age. I firmly believe that all Christians will go up in the rapture. But the promise was given to a local church, so local churches must continue until the rapture.

Third, we have the seven churches in the second and third chapters of the Revelation. These picture seven stages of church history from the apostolic age to the rapture. Each stage is pictured by a local, visible church. Why is such a picture drawn if the local, visible churches of Christ would ever cease during the Age of Grace?

Historical Evidence

If Baptists do not have a succession from Christ until now, then no "Christian" religion does. History disqualifies all others.

The Protestant religions could not have a succession back to Christ for they all began in the 16th-18th centuries. Any religion coming after them is disqualified also.

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the true and historic church of Christ, basing its claim on a succession of Roman bishops beginning with Peter. We would point out four problems with that claim:

- (1) There is no conclusive evidence that Peter was ever in Rome.
- (2) There is no biblical warrant for the primacy of the Roman bishop.
- (3) The first bishop of Rome declared to be the Pope (universal bishop) was Boniface III in 606 A.D.
- (4) The farthest back that we can date the Roman Catholic Church with any credibility is 324 A.D. when Constantine formed his state-church.

This leaves only the Baptists, if anyone. Happily (for us, at least) we can substantiate our succession by history not just one way, but two!

The Welsh Baptists

The most direct route from Palestine to America is through Wales. That is, if you are talking about Baptist history. It is apparent that the Apostle Paul led Pudens and Claudia to Christ while he was a prisoner at Rome (Acts 28:30; 2 Tim. 4:21). Pudens was a Welshman in the Roman army, Claudia being his wife. They, and other conquered Welsh took the gospel back to their land.

In 597 when the Catholic monk Austin went to Wales to convert the "heathen," he found a good number of Christian churches that claimed to exist, or to be in succession from churches that existed at the time of the Apostles. There was even a college for training ministers in Bangor. The historian Benedict gives this account:

"From the coming of Austin, the church in this island was divided into two parts, the old and the new. The old, or Baptist, church maintained their original principles. But the new church adopted infant baptism and the rest of the multiplying superstitions of Rome."

The ancient Hill Cliff Baptist Church was organized around the year 600 A.D.

We move ahead to the year 1649 when the Swansea Baptist Church of County Glamorgan, South Wales, was organized by John Miles (all the time Baptist churches had continued in Wales. A study of their history is inspiring). This same John Miles organized a Baptist church in 1663 at Kelly's Bridge, Massachusetts. Most American Baptist churches are descended from the Welsh Baptists.

The Anabaptists

Though a bit more complicated, Baptists in America can trace themselves back to Christ through the Anabaptists (rebaptizers). While it is admitted that not all who wear the label "Anabaptists" were indeed Baptists (Rome and the Protestants tended to paint enemies with a broad brush) and that in some of the Anabaptists groups there were irregularities (as there are in many Baptist churches today). Still, in every time there were churches that, in the main, held to New Testament doctrine.

In the first century, the followers of Christ were known simply as "Christians." But as some churches began to depart from the faith and the true churches separated from them, the apostates seized the name "Christian" and began to call the true churches by the name of their leaders or some other term.

Thus, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries the true churches of Christ were known as "Montanists." Of them Vedder says:

"They clearly apprehended the truth that a church of Christ should consist of the regenerated only ... Of course the Montanists immersed – no other baptism, so far as we know, was practiced by anybody in the second century. There is no evidence that they baptized infants and their principle of a regenerate church membership would naturally require the baptism of believers only."

These true believers were called “Novatians” in the 3rd and 4th centuries and “Donatists” in the 4th-6th centuries. The French historian Crispin lists the views of the Donatists:

“First for purity of church members, by asserting that none ought to be admitted to the church but such as are true believers, and true saints. Secondly, for purity of church discipline. Thirdly, for the independency of each church. Fourthly, they baptized again those whose first baptism they had reason to doubt. They were consequently rebaptizers or Anabaptists.”

Who could doubt that these Donatists were Baptists?

Those who maintained pure New Testament doctrine bore the label “Paulician” in the 7th-9th centuries, “Albigenes” in the 10th-13th centuries, and “Petro-Brusians” in the 13th-14th centuries. They were known as “Waldenses” in the 14th-16th centuries and “Anabaptists” in the 16th-18th centuries. Their spiritual descendants are known by the name “Baptist” today.

A proper study of history will reveal two important facts about the above listed groups: (1) They all held, in the main, to Baptist doctrine and practice. (2) Where one group would begin to fade out, the next group would begin to grow. In other words, they produced and grew out of each other, so that actually they are not different groups, but the same religion going under different names at different places.

What This All Means

The truth of Baptist succession does not mean that Baptists are a better class of people than any others. God has mercy upon whom He will have mercy (Rom. 9:15). But it does mean three important things.

First, that the promise of Jesus is true. The gates of hell have not prevailed against His church, no, not for an hour. Neither shall they prevail.

Second, that Baptist churches are the true churches of Christ. Therefore, true Christianity must be in them (notice I did not say “salvation,” but Christianity, i.e. the pure doctrine of Christ). If New Testament doctrine is to be found anywhere, it should be found among those who have been the “pillar and ground of the truth.”

This, of necessity, means that any “church” that differs materially from the Baptist model is a false church, set up by men in opposition to the doctrines of Christ, and working for the destruction of His churches. Let us cite two examples:

(1) If Methodism gained the day and converted the world, would there be such a thing as believer’s baptism?

(2) If Presbyterianism was able to win out against all others, where would we find scriptural church government?

At this point some would say, “Why can’t we just work together” (like ecumenism and fundamentalism). To which I reply: if you believe your religion is right according to the Scriptures you should refuse to cooperate with error. If you don’t believe that your religion is right then you are a fool to remain in it one more moment.

Third, it means that Baptist churches, as the true churches of Christ, have a unique responsibility to Him. That responsibility is found in Matthew 28:18-20:

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”



Who Were The First Baptists?

Norman H. Wells

From *The Church That Jesus Loved*, 1973 (Chapter 18)

When did the Baptists begin? Where did they start? What is their origin? We would like to look at the answer to these questions.

"And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; AND THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT" — Matt. 16:18.

This is the first mention of the church in the Bible. It states the fact for the first time that Christ will build a church.

We would like to notice the promise that Christ made to this church. He said, "AND THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT."

THIS IS GOD'S PROMISE OF PERPETUITY TO THE CHURCH

This language can only be accepted as meaning that neither the powers of death nor of Satan would ever triumph over the church. Despite the fact of death, disease, martyrdom and persecution, the church was to live on and never die. Men and generations were to pass, but the church was to live on.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? TO WHOM DOES IT APPLY? Certainly it cannot mean that the particular assembly that existed during the lifetime of Christ was to continue and never die! It cannot mean that the particular church at Jerusalem was to continue from generation to generation and never die because this has not happened.

The word "church" as used in Matt. 16:18 is used abstractly and generically. To use a word abstractly and generically is to use it apart from any application to a particular subject. To use a word generically is to use it in a general way and not specific. It is used in reference to a class, order, kind or sort.

We do not have to leave the New Testament to find, examples of words that are used abstractly and generically,' "For the husband is the head of the wife." (Eph. 5:23)

The word "husband" and the word "wife" are used abstractly and generically. This refers to all husbands and all wives in a general application. No specific husband or wife is named. If this were brought down to a particular husband or wife it would have to be something like, "Husband John is the head of his wife Mary."

Another example is found in Eph. 6:1. "Children obey your parents in the Lord."

The word "children" and the word "parents" are used generically and abstractly. What is said applied to all children and parents of all ages. It has particular application to each individual child and each individual parent.

THE WORD "CHURCH" IN MATTHEW 16:18 IS USED ABSTRACTLY AND GENERICALLY

The expression, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" does not mean that one particular, local, church would endure throughout all generations. This promise is to all churches in a general application. IT MEANS THAT THE GATES OF HELL WOULD NEVER PREVAIL BECAUSE THERE WOULD ALWAYS BE CHURCHES AFTER THE ORDER OF THE ONE THAT CHRIST ESTABLISHED.

For example, it could be said that, "There will always be a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, and nothing can change this." This would not be accepted as meaning that one particular husband or one particular wife was going to always exist but that there would always be, in every age, a particular husband and particular wife.

THIS PROMISE IN MATTHEW 16:18 IS TO BE ACCEPTED AS MEANING THAT IN EVERY AGE THERE WOULD BE IN EXISTENCE THOSE PARTICULAR CHURCHES OF CHRIST LIKE UNTO THE ONE CHRIST ESTABLISHED! Other Scriptures bear out this truth.

Accepting this fact that there will be those churches titer the order of the one established by Christ in every age means THAT THOSE CHURCHES HAVE TO EXIST TODAY! This means there has to be in existence today those churches that can be identified with the church that Jesus built.

Accepting the fact that the church that Christ established exists today makes it necessary for all true believers to desire to identify themselves with this church.

BAPTISTS BELIEVE THEY ARE THAT CHURCH

The people that are today called Baptists began when Christ established the first church and they have existed in every age. They might not have always been called Baptists but they were always there and today's Baptists are identified with them.

WHO WERE THE FIRST BAPTISTS? They were the ones that Christ used to establish the first church.



The Christian's Resource in Affliction _____

J. J. Brown, Birmingham
From *The Baptist Magazine*, 1858

"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." (James 5:13)

Human life consists of alternations of joy and sorrow. These make up both the experience and the discipline of the present state. They form the chief elements which enter into individual experience, and they mark the changes which constitute the history of families and of nations. The one follows the other in rapid succession, and sometimes joy and sorrow are so intermingled that it is difficult to determine which feeling preponderates. No one is entirely free from "affliction;" no one is wholly precluded from being "merry." Now adversity depresses the soul, and then prosperity elates the mind. Joy and sorrow are frequently found mingled in the same families, oftentimes struggling in at same heart.

They resemble the changeable season of spring. As at one moment the sun shines in mild, but unclouded radiance, and at another the heavens are clothed with vapour, and the refreshing shower descends. So at one instant the heart is "merry," and the smile lights up the countenance, and at the next the tears suffuse the cheeks, and chase away the transient gleam.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is designed to regulate every state in which we can be placed. Its holy and consolatory influences extend to every condition and circumstance of human life. It is intended to sanctify both our trials and our pleasures. It does not promise exemption from affliction, but it provides a resource for the afflicted. It does not secure constant joy and gladness, but it increases, purifies, and regulates them when possessed.

There are many who reserve religion for special seasons and circumstances. They deem it suitable for adversity, affliction, and death. They think it can minister support in trial, consolation in sorrow, and hope in death. It enters the house with the

physician, and leaves it with him also. They do not see its excellency, nor feel their need of it in prosperity. They think it detracts from their enjoyments, and casts a gloom upon their happiest moments. It interferes with the desires, affections, and pursuits which they cherish. It prescribes a discipline, and enforces duties for which they have no taste. In short, with multitudes religion is a refuge to which they would escape at last : under the influence of the gospel they fain would die, but would not live.

The holy Scriptures present religion to us in a very different light. Religion has its place in joy as well as in sorrow. It has modes of expression suited to the meanest heart as well as the saddest spirit. It has mercies designed for the heights of prosperity and for the depths of adversity. It has its seat in the soul, and rules over all the affections of the inward man, and all the actions of the outward man. It furnishes holy vent for all the emotions of the mind; it teaches the afflicted soul to pray, and the merry heart to sing.

"Is any among you afflicted?" If this inquiry were put in any moderate-sized company, it would be sure to be answered in the affirmative. There is a large amount of affliction in our world. We continually witness it in others. We sometimes are the subjects of it ourselves. Some suffer acutely in body; others suffer yet more acutely in mind. "Man is born unto trouble." (Job 5:7) It is the common patrimony of our race.

In every period of life, in every station of society, we are exposed to suffering. There are griefs which are common to all; there are others which are peculiar to some. There are afflictions with which we can all sympathise, for we have experienced them ourselves. There are others, the intensity and bitterness of which we cannot comprehend, for we have never passed through them. We can trace physical suffering in the prostration of the outward frame. We can see the effects of mental suffering in the saddened countenance, but there are depths of sorrow which we cannot penetrate, and which can only be fully understood by God.

The manner in which affliction is borne, and the effects which it produces, are very varied. With multitudes who are acquainted with the great truths of the Christian faith, it does lead to humble, penitential, fervent prayer. By many, affliction is borne with almost total insensibility. They endure it in proud, hard, cold indifference; it is looked upon as inevitable, and must be borne.

The losses, and bereavements, and sufferings of life, are treated as the decrees of some stern power against which it is in vain to contend. They regard themselves as the slaves of circumstances. They are ready to say that they must submit to their destiny. They are "dumb" under afflictions; not from the conviction that they are wise, and just, and good, but from feeling which is akin to despair. The trials of life lead to no serious reflection. They excite no deep and solemn feeling; they are associated with no cause, and are regarded as conducive to no end. God is not recognised in them; the discipline of life is not advanced by them.

There are many upon whom affliction produces a different, but by no means a better, effect. It excites irritation, discontent, and murmuring. It is regarded as a wrong inflicted. The sufferer rebels against the chastening hand. He does not attempt to conceal his dissatisfaction. It is proclaimed by his lowering brow; it is seen in his morose, impatient, fretful temper; and sometimes it finds utterance in express complaint. It has the effect to bring to light those moral humours which lay latent in the soul, as medicine does those which lie concealed in the body. But it exercises no soothing, subduing influence. It produces no purifying effect upon the soul. It does not lead the sufferer to pray. He may cry out, but it is in impatience, for the removal of the affliction itself.

He is silent, but it is in hard, reckless endurance of what can neither be alleviated nor removed. There is no supplication for strength to bear the affliction, or for grace to submit to the Divine will. There is no desire that the visitation may be sanctified, and that the spiritual interests of the sufferer may be subserved by the affliction. There is no faith in God; no confidence in his wisdom and goodness; no humiliation under his chastening hand.

What is uttered is the language of complaint, not of prayer. It is the expression of the discontented, rebellious; not the supplication of the humble, contrite, believing soul. These are the ways in which affliction is borne by the great majority of mankind. It is submitted to in hard, thoughtless insensibility. It is regarded as the result of blind fortune, or inevitable destiny. It gives utterance to complaint, and not to prayer.

This is very far from the Christian spirit and temper. The afflictions of the Christian lead him to prayer; the experience of every believer harmonizes with the apostolic precept. The first thought which suffering excites in the Christian mind is that of prayer. The natural prompting of the renewed mind directs the believer to the mercy seat. He goes to his Heavenly Father, and unloads all his griefs before him. With the humility of a sinner and the confidence of a child, he will pour out his heart. He will wait for no other consolations; he will apply to no secondary sources of comfort and strength, but he goes at once to the throne of grace.

Valuable as is the privilege of prayer at all times, it is especially precious in seasons of affliction. It is sweet to confide our cares to a tender and kind friend. It affords some relief to pour our sorrows into his bosom, and to be assured that we have his sympathy. But human sympathy is difficult to excite, is weak and changeable when awakened, is not equal to the demands which suffering makes upon it, nor can the afflicted always calculate upon it.

But it is not so with the Divine tenderness and sympathy. He "knoweth what is in man." (John 2:25) He "knoweth our frame; he remembereth we are dust." (Ps. 103:14) "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." (Ps. 103:13) He knows how little we are able to bear, how ready we are to despond and faint in our minds, and, therefore, we may go to him in the "full assurance of faith" that we shall meet with acceptance, sympathy, and consolation.

There are many reasons which show how peculiarly suited prayer is to the afflicted. Let us cite only two of them.

In the first place, we thus recognise the Divine agency in superintending them. We are in danger of losing sight of God in the secondary agencies which we are able to trace. The Divine agency is imperceptible, though always operating. No sense can discern his movements. We hear not his steps—we see not his hand. This organ is deranged, or that member is inflamed. One part of the frame discharges its functions too rapidly, and another too slowly. One portion of the organization has been heated to excess, and another has been chilled. We rarely rise from these secondary causes to the great First Cause on which they all depend. We rest in that which is seen, understood, and explained by us.

And yet "affliction cometh not forth out of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." (Job 5:6) As our "times are in the hand of the LORD," (Ps. 31:15), so are all the events and incidents through which we have to pass. Prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, life and death, are superintended by him. He mingles the ingredients in our cups; he chooses our inheritance for us. As we "receive good at the hand of God," (Job 2:10), so too we "must receive evil." (Job 2:10)

In all this he has wise and beneficent purposes to accomplish. He is excellent in counsel and wonderful in working. He sees some diseases which need to be removed, or some graces which require discipline for their development and growth. He has perceived some sins of which you need to be convinced. They may have been committed in secret, unseen and unsuspected by man, and the more dangerous on that very account, but they were not unknown to God.

In affliction our sins are often brought before us in bold and striking relief. We see how gradually and imperceptibly we were becoming worldly and carnal. We discover the sinfulness of our selfish and unsanctified tempers. We feel our need of sympathy and tenderness from others; and thus are prepared in some measure to cultivate the same dispositions towards those who require them. We are ready to exclaim:

"Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." (Ps. 19:12) He designs to promote your holiness. It is trial by fire, in order to purify; it is pruning, in order to growth and fruit-bearing; it is discipline, in order to spiritual health, vigour, and progress.

"By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is the fruit of it, to take away his sin." (Isa. 27:9)

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby." (Heb. 12:11)

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." (Heb. 12:5-6)

Now, in prayer, we acknowledge the agency of God in the afflictions through which we pass. We rise superior to visible, secondary, human causes; we rest only in unseen, spiritual, Divine agency. We trace the confusions of time to the order of eternity; we associate the changes of earth with the immutability of heaven. In prayer, we say emphatically, "It is the Lord" that acts; he elevates, he depresses, he kills, he makes alive. "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21) We "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God." (1 Pet. 5:6)

In the next place, the seasonableness of prayer in affliction arises from the peculiar grace which we need. It is exceedingly difficult to bear suffering well. We are naturally disposed to murmur and rebel. We do not welcome the visitation; we do not feel our need of the rebuke or the chastening. We are ready to ask in tones of sullen peevishness, if not of positive anger, "Wherefore dost thou contend with me?" Divine assistance is especially necessary in seasons of trial. We need strength, and patience, and resignation, and we must pray for them.

Would you be still, submissive to the will of Heaven, in the hour of trial? Then retire from the world and pour out your souls before God in secret. Would you derive from your afflictions all the good they are designed to confer? Then pray that God would teach you the end for which they are sent; would sanctify them and accompany them with gracious effusions of his Holy Spirit. The power of prayer is confessedly great.

The apostle James says, it "availeth much." (James 5:16) It has stayed the sun in his daily march, and the moon in her nightly walk. It has made the heavens as brass that they should not rain; and it has caused the fertilising showers to descend. It has healed the sick. It has raised the dead. Even in our own experience it is impossible to estimate its influence. It is quite impossible to say how many blessings we have received in direct answer to prayer.

We are not able to trace the connection between the cause and the effect, and we are scarcely willing to believe there is one. We are infidels on our very knees. And it is equally impossible to say how many mercies we "have not, because we ask not." (James 4:2) Without expecting any supernatural intervention in answer to prayer, its power is great; it calms the spirit and strengthens the mind of the afflicted. "

From the ends of the earth will I call upon thee, when my heart is in heaviness;" and if the answer comes in no other form, it will come in the form of peace to the soul. It will be found the antidote to despondency. It will silence complaint and murmuring. It will impart a softness and tenderness to the very sorrows which he endures. It will calm the perturbed passions of the human spirit. It will help to cherish child-like confidence and submission. It will bring down the sanctifying blessings of God upon our trials.

There are many other arguments by which the seasonableness of prayer in affliction might be urged. Let these suffice. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." (James 5:13) From whatever cause the affliction arises, this is the best resource to which you can apply. In every personal sorrow be humble, fervent in prayer. In every domestic trial, go to the throne of divine mercy. In every calamity bow yourself before the Lord of heaven and earth. If the affliction is to be removed, this is one of the means to affect it; if it is to be borne, this is the quarter in which you must seek the requisite strength. To pray is your duty, to pray is your privilege.

While you thus pray in your own afflictions cultivate sympathy with others. "Weep with them that weep." (Rom 12:15) While you may be "merry," there are others who are deeply "afflicted." In the very same street, in the very next dwelling, they may often be found. You may lighten their sorrows and cheer their hearts. The very expression of your countenance and the tones of your voice may impart comfort. Alas! for that person who has never sympathised with others! When he most needs sympathy himself, he will be incapable of receiving it.



No Man Has A Right To Do As He Pleases Unless He Pleases To Do Right

The Duty of Delighting in the Will and Works of God

J. L. Dagg

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- "Delight thyself in the Lord". (Ps. 37:4)
- "I will delight myself in thy commandments." (Ps. 119:47)
- "Declare his works with rejoicing." (Ps. 107:22)

If any one supposes that religion consists merely of self-denial and painful austerities, and that it is filled with gloom and melancholy, to the exclusion of all happiness, he greatly mistakes its true character. False religions, and false views of the true religion, may be liable to this charge, but the religion which has God for its author, and which leads the soul to God, is full of peace and joy. It renders us cheerful amidst the trials of life, contented with all the allotments of Divine Providence, happy in the exercises of piety and devotion, and joyful in the hope of an endless felicity.

Heaven is near in prospect, and while on the way to that world of perfect and eternal bliss, we are permitted, in some measure, to anticipate its joys, being, even here, blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. "I will delight to do thy will." (Ps. 40:8)

We are enabled, not only to pursue our pilgrimage to the good land with content and cheerfulness, but even to "delight ourselves in the Lord." Our happiness is not merely the absence of grief and pain, but it is positive delight. The delight which attends other religious exercises should be felt in the investigation of religious truth, and should stimulate to diligence and perseverance. Divine truth is not only sanctifying, but it is also beatifying. To the ancient saints it was sweeter than honey and the honeycomb (Ps. 19:10), and the early Christians, in "believing" the truth as it is in Jesus, "rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (I Pet. 1:8)

If we loved the truth as we ought, we should experience equal delight in receiving it, and the careful investigation of it would be a source of pure and abiding pleasure. It would not suffice to employ our intellectual powers in the discussion of perplexing questions appertaining to religion, but we should find a rich feast in the truth that may be known and read by all.

The man who indulges his skeptical doubts, and suffers himself to be detained by questions to no profit, is like one who, when a bountiful feast is spread before him, instead of enjoying the offered food, employs himself in examining a supposed flaw in the dish in which it is served. The glorious truths which are plainly revealed concerning God, and the things of God, are sufficient to enable everyone to delight himself in the Lord.

We have before seen that love to God lies at the foundation of true religion. Love, considered as simple benevolence, has for its object the production of happiness, and not the receiving of it. But, by the wise arrangements of infinite goodness, the producing of happiness blesses him that gives as well as him that receives. It is even "more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts. 20:35)

But when God is the object of our love, as we cannot increase his happiness, we delight in it as already perfect; and all the outflowing of our love to him, finding the measure of his bliss already full, returns back on ourselves, filling us also with the fulness of God. God is love; and to love God with all the heart is to have the heart filled, to the full measure of its capacity, with the blessedness of the divine nature. This is the fulness of delight.

In the existence and attributes of God a sufficient foundation is laid for the claim of supreme love to him; but, for the active exercise of the holy affection, God must be viewed not merely as existing, but as acting. To produce delight in him, his perfections must be manifested. So we enjoy the objects of our earthly love by their presence with us, and the display of those qualities which attract our hearts.

When the Son of God consented to appear in human nature for the salvation of man, he said: "I delight to do thy will, O my God." (Ps. 40:8) If the same mind were in us that was in Christ Jesus, we, too, would delight in the will of God. We should be able to say with David, "I will delight myself in thy commandments;" and with Paul, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." (Rom 7:27) We should yield obedience to every precept, not reluctantly, but cheerfully; not cheerfully only, but with joy and delight.

It would be to us meat and drink to do the will of God, as it was to our blessed Lord. Our religious enjoyment would consist not merely in receiving good from God, but in rendering active service to him; like the happy spirits before the throne, who serve God day and night, and delight in his service. Not only should we delight to render personal service to our Sovereign, but we should desire his will to be done by all others, and should rejoice in his universal dominion. "The LORD reigneth, let the earth rejoice." (Ps. 97:1)

As the ancient saints delighted in the will and government of God, so they delighted in his works. They saw in them the manifestations of his wisdom, power, and goodness; and they delighted to meditate on them. His glory, displayed in the heavens, and his handywork, visible in earth, they contemplated with holy pleasure. They rejoiced to remember, "It is he that made us;" (Ps. 100:3) and, in approaching him with religious worship, they were accustomed to address him as the Creator of all things: "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." (Acts 4:24)

The goodness displayed in God's works awakens gratitude in the pious man. While he enjoys the gift, he recognizes the hand which bestows it; and each blessing is rendered more dear because it has been conferred by him whom he supremely loves. He sees in creation a vast storehouse of enjoyment, and blesses the author of it. He receives from the providence of God the innumerable benefits which are every day bestowed, and he blesses the kind bestower. God is in every mercy, and his heart, in enjoying it, goes out ever to God, with incessant praise and thanksgiving.

The trial of our delight in God is experienced when affliction comes. The pious man feels that this, too, is from the hand of God. So thought all the saints, of whose religious exercises the Bible gives us an account. They bowed under affliction in the spirit of resignation to God, as the author of the affliction. So Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21) So David, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." (Ps. 39:9) So Eli, "It is the LORD; let him do what seemeth him good." (1 Sam.3:18) So Paul's companions, "We ceased, saying, the will of the Lord be done." (Acts 21:14)

The ancient saints believed in an overruling Providence, and they received all afflictions as ordered by him, in every particular; and on this faith the resignation was founded by which their eminent piety was distinguished. To the flesh, the affliction was not joyous, but grievous, and, therefore, they could not delight in it, when considered in itself, but when enduring it with keenest anguish, they could still say, with Job, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." They firmly believed that the dispensation was wisely and kindly ordered, and that God would bring good out of the evil, and however oppressed with suffering, and filled with present sorrow, they still trusted in God, and delight in him alleviated their misery, and mingled with their sorrows.

Let love to God burn in our hearts while we contemplate his existence and attributes. Let delight in him rise to the highest rapture of which earthly minds are susceptible, while we study his will and works. The grand work of redemption, into which the angels especially desire to look, and which is the chief theme of the song of the glorified, is fitted to produce higher ecstasy, but even the themes of creation and providence may fill us with delight, if we approach them as we ought. When the foundations of the earth were laid, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, and angels now delight to be the ministers of God's providence. Let us, with like devotion to Almighty God, delight in his will and works.

