

ARTICLE VI.

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

by Benjamin Mosby Smith [1811-1893]

The Sacraments of the New Testament, as Instituted by Christ,
By GEORGE D. ARMSTRONG, D. D., Pastor of the First Pres-
byterian Church, Norfolk, Va. New York: A. C. Armstrong
& Son, 714 Broadway. 1880. Part I., pp. 232; Part II.,
pp. 314. 12mo.

This is a timely discussion. Twenty years ago the author published that part which is entitled *The Doctrine of Baptisms*," except the portion appropriated to the subject of Baptismal Regeneration. He has now presented also the careful examination of the other "Sacrament," the "Lord's Supper as set forth in the Word of God."

The author gives three features of the "aim" which he has proposed in this publication : (1) That it shall be thoroughly *scriptural*; (2) That it shall be adapted to the present state of the controversies in Christian Churches; (3) That it shall be adapted to the comprehension of the average English reader. With this brief statement of the "aim" proposed by the author, may be added a more extended explanation of each aspect of the discussion, as presented in the work itself, including in this the author's own views.

1. The subject discussed is eminently scriptural. "Sacraments" are of divine institution and revelation. They belong to the scheme of redemption. They have no basis in natural religion as a scheme of doctrine or a teacher of duty. Hence any discussion based on expediencies, or the fitness of things, or the results of speculations on the relations of God and man—any *a priori* process of reasoning, suggesting what *man* thinks God ought to have instituted or revealed, the modes and subjects, the nature and benefits of sacraments, according to the teachings of human reason—are all simply outside the purpose and plan of such a discussion. The authority of the "primitive Church," as set forth even in the "Ante-Nicene Fathers," is a mere human teaching, not especially valuable by antiquity or proximity of its

expounders to the time of the apostles; for during that time while Paul yet lived, not only had the gospel itself been so corrupted that the teaching of some was pronounced “another gospel, which is not another,” but a perversion (Gal. i. 6, 7); but the holy sacrament of the Lord’s Supper itself had been grossly misapprehended and corrupted. Dr. Armstrong has fully verified his “aim” in this aspect. He has collected and presented, under appropriate headings, the entire teachings of Scripture on both sacraments. Of course others may possess equal reverence for Scripture and make as full quotations, and yet so interpret the sacred revelation as to mislead the reader. Hence our author has not only given his own interpretations and sustained them by trustworthy critical examinations of the terms used in the original languages, but he has also subjected the language, in which opposing views are presented, whether on personal responsibility or that of ecclesiastical organisations by their symbols, to careful and searching investigation. How fully and ably he has done this, can be only ascertained by an examination of the volume. He has thus sustained his claim to teach only what the Scriptures teach, either in express terms or by fair inference. True, many not only of his own, but other churches, may except to some of his “inferences,” as for example his view of John’s baptism. There may also be some question raised as to the correctness of his views on the question whether baptism necessarily precedes the access of a believer to the Lord’s table. But we apprehend there will be decided satisfaction as to all his teachings, which are fundamental on the doctrines of baptisms, by all not wedded to what Dr. Dale calls “The System.” Without any pedantic or other offensive display of learning, Dr. Armstrong has showed a clear perception of the right use of language in his full illustrations of the senses which words acquire in passing from a usage to describe *secular* things to that which describes *sacred*. Especially is this true, and generally accepted as such by scholars, as to those words adopted from classic Greek to present subjects of purely divine revelation, and of which the heathen writers had no conceptions; such as “church” by a word before used only to mean “assembly.” “Martyr,” in Church History, is a sufferer

in Christ's cause; formerly it only meant "witness." "Presbyter" or "elder" is a church officer; formerly only an "old man." As "old men" in the patriarchal times were rulers, then, when tribal and national organisations emerged from patriarchal, the same word was employed to denote a ruler. And this occurred in civil government as well as ecclesiastical. Thus, "senator" from Latin "senex," "old man"; and from the same we have in modern languages "seigneur" and "signor." "Pastor" in Greek and Latin means a shepherd, but in ecclesiastical language a church officer. These illustrations might be much extended, but enough have been given. Now "circumcise" and "baptize" are words of the same history. In ancient languages *circumcise* meant only to *cut around*; then in religious use to denote a rite which symbolised purifications. Hence "to circumcise the heart," "circumcision of the spirit," "the circumcision" for the people who practised the rite. So *baptize*, in literal use, to overwhelm with water; then tropically, to express the act of being *subject to an influence*, and then especially of subjection to purifying agencies, and so *baptism* expressing *purifications*. Thus the dispute of the disciples of John and the Pharisees (John iii. 22-26) "about purification" is mentioned in connexion with the record of John's baptizing; and the "vessels of water" (John ii. 6) are mentioned as connected with "the manner," or literally, "according to the purification" of the Jews; evidently (for the contents were insufficient for immersion) for the use of those needing water for the various religious purifications prescribed by Moses' law and in constant practice in our Saviour's time. The foregoing abstract of Dr. Armstrong's method of argument is a pertinent specimen of the plain and direct mode of discussing the "Doctrine of Baptisms" which everywhere characterises his work, and is as clearly exhibited in the able discussion of the other sacrament, the Lord's Supper.

2. The first sentence in this article is suggestive of the second aspect of Dr. Armstrong's "aim," as fully carried out as that just presented. He proposes a discussion "adapted to our times"—*timely*. However fully the "Doctrine of Baptisms" has been presented, both in the interests of Immersionists and Affusionists,

it is eminently true that new arguments of assault on Pædobaptist views and new grounds of defence are continually presented. Discussions, thorough and exhaustive a century ago, do not fully meet the necessities of our time. Dr. Dale's voluminous and learned work, in four octavo volumes, might seem ample to cover the entire ground of defence, and conclusive in its able exposure of the one-sided scholarship, the prejudices, and the perverse mis-application of Scripture, which have for years distinguished the advocates of "The System." But this work is not *popular*. It does not reach the modes of thought and the sentiments of the masses. If properly studied by all our ministers and its methods presented in a popular style, it is calculated to be indefinitely applicable to all phases of the Baptist controversy and extensively useful. Dr. Armstrong, however, by different and shorter methods, has done for the masses what Dr. Dale has done for scholars. His discussion is fully abreast with our times, and it would be an interesting spectacle to witness how those who are ever ringing the changes on "Baptize means to dip, always to dip, and nothing else but dip" of Dr. Carson, can meet the arguments and illustrations of Dr. Armstrong to show, that in its *religious* sense, it means "to purify, always to purify, and nothing else but to purify"—*i. e.*, to express the act of putting one in a typically or symbolically purified state, suggestive, in mode and scripturally sustained exemplification, of the *religious purifying* of which the Holy Spirit is the agent and the man receiving "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" is the recipient.

3. Equally pertinent to our times is Dr. Armstrong's brief but conclusive refutation of the idle prating, whether of Campbellites, Ritual Episcopalians, or the example and ally of both, the Papists. If "the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean," could only avail to "the purifying of the flesh," but had no power "to purge men's consciences from dead works to serve the living God," how shall the sprinkling of a spoonful of water now "purge men's consciences"—aye, renew and sanctify the "heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" ?

4. In his discussions with Christians who differ conscientiously from himself, and even with the Papists, our author is ever scrupulous in his courtesy. Towards the advocates of immersion we cannot but think he goes farther than any rights they can claim would entitle them, in uniformly conceding to them the name they arrogate to themselves exclusively of "Baptists." We confess that here we should be less amiable and yielding than Dr. Armstrong. These Christians object strongly to "baptize" as a rendering of the Greek term; they insist that it means nothing but "immerse;" an influential part of them have even insisted on a new English Bible, in order to get rid of this naughty and ambiguous word, "baptize." We should say to them, "Nay, gentlemen, you cannot 'eat your cake and have it, too.' If 'immerse' is the word, then you should be called 'Immersionists,' or if it suits you better, 'Dippers,' all 'through the chapter.' " They have no right to expect us to concede the name "Baptists" to them; because the very name is an assumption of the position that immersion alone is baptism; and that all undipped persons are wholly unbaptized. But *that is the very thing in dispute*. We cannot seem to concede it without stultifying ourselves. The policy of the Immersionists, in arrogating the name, is as shrewd as it is unfair. By its perpetual and admitted use, they make the impression on the unthinking that they are the only denomination of Christians which really obeys the Saviour's command to baptize. Is this just to ourselves? Nay, we are the true Baptists, and they are the Immersionists or Dippers.

Dr. Armstrong is peculiarly strong, while fair and courteous, upon the topic of "close communion." Here he meets the Immersionists on their own ground, and inflicts on them a total overthrow. He shows that they do not, as is so often assumed, reason from their premises as Presbyterians do from theirs. Immersionists often endeavor to break the force of the just feeling against the uncharitableness of "close communion" by saying: "We cannot be blamed for merely reasoning consistently from our premises" ! True: but they *are to be blamed* for taking up premises which are neither true nor just; and which, when consistently carried out, lead to unchristian conclusions. The Jews

VOL. XXXI., NO. 2—17.

presumed that Jesus of Nazareth was guilty of religious imposture and blasphemy. From this presumption it followed most logically, that by the law of Moses he should be punished capitally. Yet these Jews were murderers! Their guilt was not that they reasoned consistently from their premises, but that they took up wicked premises to reason from.

“No unbaptized person should approach the Lord’s table.” “Nothing but immersion is valid baptism.” Let it be granted, for argument’s sake, that the regular inference hence must be close communion : so Immersionists say. But there is another set of premises, from which no Christian mind or heart can dissent, as Dr. Armstrong has shown. From these it follows inevitably, that he whom God accepts in Christ should not be excluded by the ministers of Christ’s Church. To the gigantic and sanctified intellects of a Mason and a Robert Hail this argument was irresistible. Now, when one argues regularly to two irreconcilable conclusions, this is the clearest proof that his positions were in part wrong. So it is here; immersion is not the only valid baptism ; Christ himself disclaims it by giving every mark and blessing of the visible Church to us Baptists who are not dipped.

Wise men have often said that logical results, however disclaimed and deprecated, will always work themselves to the surface in the end, where their premises are obstinately held. It is obvious that the dogma, “Nothing is valid baptism but immersion,” logically unchurches every Church and every Christian in the world, except the dipped. This is the uncharitable and odious position which some years ago was known as “Old Landmarkism,” held by a few bigoted Immersionists, deprecated and disclaimed with an amiable inconsistency by the more pious and enlightened of that denomination. But the natural fruit of the evil root is rapidly growing. Their journals now say, that not one-fourth of their churches or preachers would recognise the ordination of the holiest, most learned, and useful Pædobaptist. The logic is perfectly regular from its false starting place: that “nothing but immersion is valid baptism.” Then, none but the dipped are baptized. Baptism regularly and ordinarily initiates church membership. When all the members are unchurched, no church

is left. No man can be an officer in a commonwealth of which he is not even a member. Hence there is no candidate capable of ordination, and no church to ordain him. Yes, the shocking, the unchristian conclusion is inexorable. While sorry that any Christians should thus pervert Christian truth, we are yet glad for the sake of the truth that Immersionism is thus unmasking itself. It is our just policy to invite it to do so, for then the Christian world will see the bald enormity of the result. It is this: that here, in all parts of Christendom, are societies of undipped Christians, who are indisputably on the road to heaven, who are doing more than the whole immersed world to lead others to heaven; who exhibit every Christian grace; (except zeal for dipping!) whom Christ himself has owned as his by giving them every endowment and blessing which he bestows on his dipped churches; from whose bosom a continuous stream of ransomed souls is ascending to the Church on high; but yet they are not Churches at all, because they have not seen the force of the dipping logic, forsooth! Has Popery itself done anything more sectarian, more uncharitable, except when she burned her dissenters? The first principle which leads good men like the Immersionists regularly to this monstrous issue cannot but be evil.

5. In his discussion of the sacraments, both of baptism and the Lord's Supper, our author attacks and refutes the doctrine of the Papacy, that the sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*, by the act performed. Dr. Armstrong, however, gives a fuller and more complete refutation of this great error of Rome, whether as indicated and held within the pale of the Romish Church or by those who follow her, though not, by profession, of her. This discussion is preceded by a definition of the *mass*, both of the *word* as a derivation from *missa*, a formula used for dismissing assemblies, and then as applied to denote the religious service itself. Afterwards it came to mean the observance of the Lord's Supper as an expiatory service; that constituting the central part of the whole service of worship, and so "by excellence" taking the name. This definition opens the way to discuss the nature of the sacrament as held to present (not *re-present*) "the body, blood, and divinity of our Lord." This discussion is both schol-

arly and able, and the author, while bringing the subject to the comprehension of the popular mind, draws successfully on Papal authorities and clear interpretations of Scripture to refute the whole scheme which Romanists of this century have been endeavoring to render palatable to the common sense and culture of English speaking people. He refers to and quotes ten or twelve authorised expositions of Papal doctrines, from the "Catechism of the Council of Trent" to the "Faith of our Fathers" by Archbishop Gibbons of Baltimore, published in 1879. It is impracticable in the limits of this article to present even a brief intelligible outline of the argument. But it is exceedingly desirable that our ministers and elders and the private members of the Protestant Churches in our country, should avail themselves of this excellent summary of the true way to make an "end of controversy" with Romanists in this day, when that Church is changing its tactics, and instead of approaching men with fire and faggot, preparing to cajole and win by fair speeches and sophistical reasoning. "The Word of God is still 'quick and powerful.' " With a free pulpit and a free press, and an open Bible, it is lamentable to notice how poorly many of our people are informed of the teachings of their own Protestant Confessions, and how inadequately "well read" and properly "learned in the Scriptures" to meet the emissaries of the apostate Church. With such means as our religious liberty gives us, we have only to know and love the truth and zealously unite in diffusing it to others, to defy the arts, as our fathers did, the power of Rome.

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