

The Simplicity of the Gospel of Christ

by Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin's sermon highlights the simplicity and clarity of the Gospel, emphasizing its accessibility to all and the responsibility of preachers to convey it accurately.

Scripture: Revelation 22:18

Topics: "Gospel Simplicity", "Biblical Obedience"

Description

Benjamin Franklin preaches about the simplicity and clarity of the Gospel of Christ, emphasizing that it was meant for all people, regardless of their wisdom or education. He highlights the importance of adhering to the teachings of the Bible without adding or taking away from it, as seen in scriptures like Galatians 1:8 and Revelation 22:18-19. Franklin stresses the necessity of belief in Jesus and obedience to His commands for salvation, as indicated in Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38. He concludes by urging listeners to follow the Bible as the ultimate guide for faith and practice, ensuring a clear path to salvation and eternal life.

Transcript

" Wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."--ISAIAH 35: 8.

THE Gospel of Christ was not intended by its Divine Author for a few learned or wise men, but for "every creature," learned or unlearned, wise or foolish. That which is intended for the people at large--the great mass of mankind--in the nature of the case, must be simple, easy of comprehension, and applicable to the people. It must be of such a nature that the people can lay hold of it without long, deep, and profound research. This is evident from some scriptures now to be introduced. Gal. 1: 8, Paul says, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach to you any other gospel than that which we have preached, let him be accursed. As we said before, so even now I say again, if any one preaches to you any other gospel than that which you have received, let him be accursed." This is an apostolic and divine anathema. It ought to be considered with great care. The intention of it is to preserve the gospel in its purity, as the Lord gave it, without being mutilated, or in any way perverted. It was intended for the eyes of preachers of the gospel, to make them feel the awful responsibility of handling that Word which may not be mutilated, corrupted, or perverted by man or angel, without incurring the curse of Heaven.

In connection with this language of the Apostle Paul, turn and read, near the close of the New Testament, "I testify to every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any one add to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written [69] in this book; and if any one take away from the words

of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life, and from the holy city; which things are written in this book." These utterances are full of meaning, and placed at the close of the book to warn every one of the terrible doom of the man who shall add any thing to or take any thing from this book. Is it claimed that this is simply said of the Book of Revelation? That may be; but is it not equally true of every part of the Book of God? May we add to the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude, but not to the writings of John? By no means. We may not add to any thing the Lord has said, pervert it, corrupt it, or preach any other gospel. If we do, the curse of Heaven will fall on us.

We connect two more passages with these. The Lord says, "He who believes not shall be condemned." Mark 16: 16. Again: "He who believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John 3: 36. Stop and think on the awful import of these words. They need no explaining. Their clear and terrible meaning is the first thing that strikes the attention of every one. He who believes not the Gospel shall be condemned. He who preaches any other gospel shall be accursed. He who adds any thing to it shall have the plagues recorded in it added to him. He who shall take any thing from it shall have his part taken out of the book of life, and out of the holy city. The following conclusions flow legitimately from these premises:

1. The Lord could not consistently condemn a preacher for preaching another gospel, perverting the true gospel, adding to it or taking from it, if he had not made it so easy of comprehension, clear and intelligible, that the preacher capable of preaching at all can preach it as the Lord gave it, adding nothing to it, taking nothing from it, neither perverting nor corrupting it. What he could not do consistently, he could not do at all. It is, therefore, claimed that the gospel is thus plain, and that the curse of Heaven will fall on the [70] man who preaches any other gospel, mutilates or corrupts the true one.
2. The Lord could not consistently condemn a man for not believing the gospel, if he had not made it sufficiently clear, intelligible, and credible, so that, by treating the subject fairly, a man could believe it. It is claimed, therefore, that the gospel is thus clear, intelligible, and credible, and that the Lord will condemn the man who does not believe it.

These deductions contain the theme for the balance of this discourse. Some man objects and insists that the gospel can not be thus plain and intelligible, or we would not have so many sorts of preachers, doctrines, and churches. These different sorts of doctrines, preachers, and churches may present a difficulty hard to explain, but furnish no refutation of the ground taken in reference to the simplicity of the gospel. It might turn out, on careful examination, that these differences are not about the gospel, or any thing in it. No matter what they are about, they do not prove that the gospel is not clear and intelligible. The prophet Isaiah considered the way plain, for he said, "The wayfaring men, though fools, should not err therein." See Isaiah 35: 8. Our Lord considered the way to God plain, for he said, "They who seek shall find." See Matt. 7: 8.

It is not some man's opinion that is here placed before you, nor some man's comment. The matter on which a man is to make up his mind is the clear and unequivocal statements of Scripture. Are they true? Does he believe them? The prophet looks down through seven hundred and fifty years, to the way to God, under the new economy, and, in the most unequivocal manner, says, "The wayfaring men, though fools, should not err therein." And the Lord, in emphatic terms, says, "They who seek shall find." This ought to be an end of controversy, on all this protracted seeking, to find the way to God, or how to become a Christian. "But," says a man, "I have known many persons who have been seekers for years, and have not found the Saviour." Nothing of this kind can disprove [71] the words of the prophet or of Jesus. These words still

stand true, and will till the day of judgment. The Lord did not intend that men should find who would not regard his directions where and how to find, but seek him where and in a way in which the Lord never promised to be found. When a clear description is given, and full information where and how any thing may be found, and a man goes somewhere else and seeks it, he ought not to be surprised if he does not find.

But now the question comes up for our consideration, whether it turned out as the prophet and the Lord said. When the new and living way was opened up, and the door of the kingdom thrown wide open, did sinners have protracted seeking and many of them fail to find the way? Let us examine. At the opening of the kingdom, on the great Pentecost, the people heard one discourse, and inquired, "What shall we do?" In one sentence the apostle answered their question; told them what to do, so that they understood him, did what he commanded, and the same day became Christians, and entered into the kingdom. We find no account of a seeker going away seeking, or a mourner going away mourning. Every man and woman who inquired the way, was shown the way; told what to do to be accepted of the Lord, did it the same day, and entered the new covenant. Thus the gospel is easily understood and easily obeyed. This fulfills the words of Jesus: "They who seek shall find." What a wonderful contrast this case makes with much of the procedure in modern times! They talk in some of these modern establishments, called churches, of "Pentecostal occasions." But when did they ever have a vast number of "mourners," "seekers," "inquirers," or "anxious persons," come to them, inquiring, "What shall we do?" and proceed forthwith, in one single sentence, to tell them what to do, so that they could do it the same day, and enter the covenant and not a mourner left mourning, or a seeker go away seeking? They can tell you how many anxious persons there were, how many "experienced a change," or how many were "hopefully [72] converted;" but a case where every one was shown the way to God, what to do to obtain pardon, so that each one did it the same day, and entered into the covenant with God, is what they can not do. The plain truth is, they have no plan of salvation; no definite, clear, and intelligible terms with which a soul of the race can comply and become a Christian. It is as clear as sunbeams that the apostles had definite, clear, and intelligible terms of salvation, which they could place before men, with which they could forthwith comply and come to the promise of pardon. Hence, when the three thousand inquired, "What shall we do?" the apostle had an answer, which he could utter, in one single sentence, definitely, clearly, and intelligibly informing them what to do, so that they understood it, and did it the same day, and entered the kingdom of God. Not a seeker went away seeking, nor a mourner went away mourning, nor a single failure of any sort.

If any man thinks this is making too much of a single case, turn to the next case, in the apostolic practice--Acts 3: 19--and find the directions there given, and see how many seekers went away seeking, and he will find no account of a single case of the kind. In a single sentence, the apostle told them what to do; they did it, and were immediately accepted. There was not a single failure. There was no such thing as honest people, seriously and earnestly trying to become Christians, and utterly failing. Turn to the eighth chapter and follow the evangelist of Jesus Christ, and you find him showing every man and woman that came to him what to do to come to the Lord, and not a failure is made. Every sincere inquirer is told how to become a Christian, shown how to enter into the covenant, on the first interview with the preacher. Read on and examine the account of the preaching to the Ethiopian officer, treasurer of Queen Candace, and, during the first interview, Philip points him to the Lamb of God, shows him the way into the kingdom, receives him, and he goes on his way rejoicing. This preacher had [73] definite, clear, and intelligible terms of pardon; presented them to the officer, who at once complied with them, and was accepted of the Lord.

The same was true in the case of young Saul, as recorded in the ninth chapter of Acts. Ananias was sent to him to tell him what he must do. As soon as he reached the room where he was, in the first sentence he uttered he told him what he must do. It was definite, clear, and intelligible. He rose forthwith, did what he was commanded, and was pardoned. Though he was the chief of sinners, he did not have to wait a single day, but rose at once and yielded himself to the divine commandment. Nor was there any more delay when Peter, for the first time, appeared before the Gentiles. Though they had never heard a gospel sermon, the apostle laid the matter before them, and showed them the way to God. They followed his instructions, turned to the Lord and entered into the covenant at once, and rejoiced in the salvation of the Lord. Not a seeker or mourner went away seeking or mourning, but every honest, inquiring soul that desired it found the Lord. So it turned out in every instance under the labors of the apostles and first evangelists. They never failed, in any instance, to show the poor sinner the way to God, where he was honestly inquiring. They never made a failure. Indeed, in that day, they did not have any preachers who could not show a sinner the way to God. The Lord never called or sent any man to preach who could not, or would not, set forth the terms of pardon.

In one round sentence, from the opening of the kingdom on Pentecost, to the final amen of the Apocalypse, there is not an intimation of a single instance in which any sincere person was sent away seeking, or in which the preacher had to see the person the second time to show the way of salvation. In every instance, a sincere person, honestly desiring to become a Christian, was told what to do at once. The protracted seeking, and the numerous failures to find, of our time, are wholly unknown to the Scriptures. [74]

In contrast with this, how stands the matter in modern times? A protracted meeting commences, or, more popularly, a revival. Preaching, praying, exhorting, and singing are all brought to bear. The Lord created man with religious faculties. In such revivals these religious faculties become roused, and persons rush forward as "seekers," "inquirers," or "mourners." They cry out, "What shall we do?" The apostolic answer is entirely ignored. Not a word is said about it. The sinner is encouraged, by telling him, "They that seek shall find," and "They that mourn shall be comforted." He is exhorted to pray, to give up his whole heart, to keep back nothing. In the prayers, the Lord is entreated to "come now," "come right down," to "come with converting power," etc. The honest seeker, to the best of his ability, unites in these prayers, and is expecting an immediate power from God to perform a miraculous change in him, and make him a Christian. All the preaching, exhorting, praying, and singing lead him to expect this. It may be that some persons less sedate, thoughtful, and considerate, but more frivolous, wild, and rollicking, rise and speak of having "experienced a change," and "received a hope." The others, more solid, grave, and sober-minded, looked for the Lord to come, but knew nothing of His coming; looked for a miraculous change, but none came; tried to get a hope, but got none. They "experienced" nothing but a sad disappointment.

The preacher is now fully out at sea. He goes not to his Bible, but proceeds to encourage them, by telling how long he, or some one else, was a seeker; that the Lord has his own good time for doing His work; that they are probably keeping back something; that they have not given up the whole heart, or, in other words, that they have not been honest in the matter. They know they are sincere in the matter, and willing to humble themselves, or do anything to please God, and return again the next night. Similar prayers are offered, and the exercises much the same as before. Thus thousands of persons, as sincere as the world [75] contains, have been kept going and going, seeking and seeking, mourning and grieving, night after night, and week after week, and, in some instances, year after year, and found nothing. They have been disappointed and deceived in that which was dearer to them than all things besides! Who is to blame for

all this? Not the Gospel, for it has its definite, clear, simple, and intelligible directions to the sinner, or conditions on which the Lord promises pardon. No uncertain sound in it. Not these sincere, inquiring persons, for they heard the preacher, and did every thing he told them to do. Who, then, is to blame for this wonderful failure? The preachers, who had the New Testament lying before them, and the apostolic directions to sinners, and would not follow these directions. These are the men who are responsible, and will be held responsible in the day of judgment. An awful responsibility it will be, too. It is difficult to conceive how a man can incur a greater responsibility than to misguide the sincere, the candid, and honest; deceive them and utterly disappoint them in their efforts to find the way to God. What a responsibility has been incurred in this matter. The whole country abounds with men and women as sincere, candid, and honest as can be found on earth, who have been seekers, mourners, done every thing the preachers told them to do as faithfully as human beings could, and continued an astonishing length of time, and found nothing; demonstrated this system to be a failure. They know they have been disappointed, deceived, deluded. They have, in many instances, turned away in utter disgust, became hardened and abandoned sinners. Many of them have abandoned all churches, all preaching, and are out at sea without chart or compass.

This modern, dark, gloomy, and unintelligible system of seeking without inquiring of the Lord, in His clear, definite, and intelligible instructions, where He will be found, and where He has promised the salvation of the soul from sin, is responsible for all this. There never was a failure in the Lord's plan. The failure is [76] in men, who either do not know the Lord's plan, or will not practice it. There can be no excuse in the case. In the nature of the case, the Lord would not make the way of salvation so dark, mystical, and difficult that honest and sincere people could not find it, and then condemn them for not finding it. The very idea of men and women entering an institution, and then not knowing how to show other people the way in, is utterly ridiculous. There is, probably, no institution into which men and women have entered, in this world, and could not show others the way in, except some of the dark, misty, and foggy systems of religion. Men and women get into these, and cannot tell how they got in, or how another person can get in! This is confusion worse confounded, darkness that may be felt.

There is nothing clearer to the man acquainted with the New Testament than that, in the time of the apostles, any person who desired to be a Christian could forthwith turn to God and enter the covenant. No such thing is known to the Scriptures as persons desiring to become Christians, and seeking to do so, but could not. This is implied by all the invitations of the gospel. Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely, is the very spirit of the gospel. Thousands of these modern seekers die seeking, without even the imagination that they have found pardon. This is not the way of the Lord, nor even a wise human device, but one of the weakest, most mischievous deceptions and extensive failures ever known. Thousands of people, in all directions, need go to no man to tell them, to no preacher nor private person, for they have tried it, and know for themselves that they have tried honestly, and found nothing. They know what sort of promises were made to them, encouragements held out and advices were given, and they know that they have received nothing; that they have been utterly disappointed, misled, and deceived. This much is not a matter of opinion with them, but of personal knowledge. They know it. The injury done to these is incalculable. In numerous instances the injury can never be mended. [77] Many will go no farther, but put all religion and the Bible itself on the same footing, and never again have any confidence in religious instruction.

But some man is saying by this time, If the gospel is such a plain matter, or if you have any thing clearer, plainer, or more intelligible than what we have tried, let us have it. To this, attention shall now be given.

Beginning, then, at the starting point, what must a man believe? "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through his name." See John 20: 30, 31. As Philip was preaching Jesus to the Ethiopian officer, they came to a certain water, and the officer said, "See, here is water; what hinders me from being immersed?" The reply of the evangelist was, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." He said, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God." See Acts 8: 37. Paul says, "If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and will believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." These plain Scriptures show beyond controversy what a man must believe to become a Christian. He is not required to believe this creed, that creed, or the other creed; the thirty-nine articles of one, nor the twenty-five articles of another; the Westminster, nor the Philadelphia Confession; this theory, that theory, or the other theory; but the truth concerning the living, ascended, exalted, and glorified Jesus, who has gone into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name in heaven and on earth. The faith of a Christian does not centre in a few articles of opinion, drawn up by a few uninspired men, setting forth the difference between their opinions and the opinions of some other uninspired men, but in the ever-living person of our Lord Jesus the Christ. This explains how it was that so many heard the gospel and believed to the [78] salvation of their souls in a single day. They believed on a person, the glorious person of the Messiah. They could hear of him and believe on him in a single day, and become ready to place themselves under him, ready to be taught by him and follow him.

But a man complains that he cannot tell what repentance is; that the preachers refer to lexicons and learned authorities, and he can not tell what is right. There are but few men who have not already a pretty good idea what repentance is. This can be easily demonstrated. Suppose a man should be immersed and unite with a church, but, in a very short time, be seen reeling from intoxication, using profane and obscene language; what would men of the world say of him? They would, without hesitation, say he never repented. How do they know, if they do not know what repentance is? The truth is, they know what repentance is, or, at least, the fruits that ought to proceed from it. They understand that it ought to be such a change, in some way, whether they can describe it or not, as will result in a good life in time to come. This is true; it is such a change of mind as will result in a good life. No matter whether you know the learned definitions or not, nor whether you can explain precisely how the change is; you know it must be such a change in a man as will result in a good life. If the good life does not follow--no matter how much a man tells of wonderful changes, feelings, and emotions within him; of great heart-work, experience, and joys--nobody believes he has truly repented. No man in our day will have much confidence in any great work of grace within a man, while there is no change without. This shows that there is a pretty correct understanding what repentance is; that it is a change in the mind sufficient to change the life. If a man is travelling for some city, but on a wrong road, he will not turn and take another road till he is convinced that he is going a wrong road--till his mind is changed in regard to the road; nor will any intelligent man believe there is much change in his mind so long as he persists in travelling on the [79] wrong road. But when he turns and earnestly pursues another road, all admit that there is a change in his mind. So, when the sinner turns from his sins and travels another road, there is no doubt about the change in his mind.

But it is objected that one preacher says immersion is baptism; another, sprinkling; and another, pouring; and they resort to lexicons, translations, historians, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew; and in the midst of all this, says a man, "I can not determine what is baptism." At first sight, this has the appearance of a considerable perplexity; but there is an easy way of righting all this, to which we will now resort. Dismiss from your mind

all new translations; trouble yourself no more about lexicons; turn your ear, for the present, away from all histories, except the Bible; nor shall you be troubled with one word from Greek, Latin, or Hebrew; you may throw aside the word "immerse." Now, will you hear the common version of King James? "I will," says a reader. All right. To the common version, then, we go. Where, then, in the common version do we read of sprinkling for baptism? Do we not read that the Holy Spirit was "shed forth?" We do: but "shed forth" is not sprinkled. And if it were, it would be the Holy Spirit that was sprinkled, not water; nor is there any thing about baptism in it. There is no sprinkling for baptism in the common version, nor any other. Where, then, do you find pouring for baptism in the common version? We read that "the Holy Spirit was poured out." True, but "poured" there does not mean baptized, or the Holy Spirit was baptized, for the Holy Spirit was "poured out." This pouring was not baptizing. You can find both sprinkling and pouring in the common version, but that is not baptizing, nor is either word used in the sense of that institution, nor for baptism.

Now, be careful and note down what you do find in the common version. What was the element used in baptizing? When the Lord was baptized, he "went up straightway out of the water." See Matt. 3: 16. [80] This points to water as the element. "John was baptizing in Enon, near Salem, because there was much water there." John 3: 23. This also points to water as the element. Philip "came to a certain water." Acts 8: 36. The officer said, "See, here is water," and "they both went down into the water" (verse 38), and "came up out of the water" (verse 39). Peter said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" Acts 10: 47. These all point to the same element--water. This much is then settled.

What is the next thing to inquire about? The quantity of the element used. Is there any thing about this? Why was John baptizing in Enon, near Salem? "Because there was much water there." See John 3: 23.

Is there any thing in the common version about where they found the water? Is there any thing about bringing water to baptize? Nothing. Is there any thing said about having the water in a bowl or any similar vessel? Not a word. They were baptized of John in Jordan, as we learn (John 3: 6); "in the river of Jordan" (Mark 1: 6); in Enon (John 3: 26). As Philip and the officer went on their way, "they came unto a certain water." This shows where they found the water. They found it in its native place. It was not brought to them; they went to it.

As all the surroundings throw some light on the subject, it will be proper to inquire what they did just previous to baptizing. Philip and the officer "came unto a certain water." See Acts 8: 36. Where did that place them? Certainly, at it. What next? "They both went down into the water" (verse 38). But our preacher explains "into" there to mean at or near by. You have forgot that we are to stand by the common version. It says, "they came unto a certain water;" that is, to it, or at it. They then "went down into the water," both Philip and the eunuch. Down into the water means more than at it. Down into it gets the person in the right element and place, ready for baptizing; "and he baptized him." How was that done? What did the evangelist do to the candidate? [81]

Paul says, Colossians 2: 12, "you are buried with him in baptism." That is a plain transaction. Any man, learned or unlearned, can tell when that is done. Romans 6: 4, he says, "we are buried with him by baptism." Any person can tell whether that is done or not, if he is an eye-witness.

What followed after baptizing? Philip and the eunuch "came up out of the water." That was a plain affair. Any person will readily see how that was done.

What resulted from the baptizing? The body was washed. See Heb. 10: 22.

In sprinkling or pouring water on a candidate for baptism, the following items are out of place:

1. They do not generally find the water in its native place.
2. They do not go where there is much water.
3. They do not generally "come unto a certain," but have a little water brought unto them.
4. They do not generally go down into the water.
5. They do not bury in baptism.
6. They do not come up out of the water.
7. The body is not washed with water.

Those who immerse go unto the water, where there is much water, down into the water, bury in baptism, come up out of the water, and the body is washed with water. When this is done, the controversy about the action of baptism in the mind and conduct of the candidate is at an end. The conscience is at rest, and no further doubt remains in regard to it. This is not the case when sprinkling or pouring is used as baptism. Here the mind is continually unsettled, specially if the party reads or hears any thing on immersion. The plainness of the New Testament on this subject is such that, if any person follows its simple teaching, taking the obvious sense, there will never be any doubt left to harass and make the conscientious person unhappy. This is sufficient for any one honestly striving to do the will of God. If the heart is right in the sight of God, under the power of the faith of Christ, the belief with all the heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, [82] and the repentance strong enough to result in a future good life, when the subject is "buried in baptism," there will be no further fears, doubts, or scruples about the action of baptism.

Some one responds, "Even admitting that the action is plain, the preachers differ about the design, and I know not how to settle the point." That is also settled in the New Testament as clearly as any other thing can be or ever has been. All we have to do is honestly to give up to, and be instructed wholly by the inspired Scriptures. Start anew, as if you had never heard one word on the subject, and inquire what the will of the Lord is. Consider the following:

1. Romans 6: 3, we read of being "immersed into Christ Jesus." Gal. 3: 27, we read of being "immersed into Christ." What is immersion into Christ equivalent to? Though nothing but immersion is mentioned here as the act in which persons are transferred into Christ, it is not immersion alone, or immersion without its proper antecedents, viz., faith and repentance. Without faith and repentance, no person is a proper subject for baptism or at all fit for the sacred rite. This is what is here meant by "the proper antecedents." What is meant by the words "into Christ?" The meaning is, into the Church; into union, communion, and fellowship with Christ; into the kingdom; into the possession and enjoyment of all its rights, privileges, hopes, and enjoyments. In amount, it is the same as into remission of sins; into justification or reconciliation; for the man "in Christ" is pardoned, justified, and reconciled. He is adopted into the heavenly family. Baptism is, then, the last step, or the consummating act, in entering the kingdom.

Take another passage: "Unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God." John 3: 5. That "born of water" is a figurative expression for baptism, is admitted by all the authorities of note, and known to every man who has even a tolerable knowledge of religious literature. That Luther, Calvin, and Wesley so understood it and so [83] commented on it, is an undeniable matter of

fact. That this passage is quoted and applied to baptism in the Episcopal Prayer Book, the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, and Methodist Discipline, any one can see by referring to those books. What is the amount of entering into the kingdom of God? It is the same as entering into the Church of Christ, or into remission of sins or state of justification; for every one in the kingdom is in the Church, in Christ, pardoned, justified. Here the Lord then connects it with the work of the Spirit; for "born of the Spirit" is simply made a believer; or "begotten by the word of truth," or "through the gospel," the words of the Spirit. "Born of the Spirit" is made a believer, and "born of water" is baptism. The Lord, therefore, connects the work of the Spirit, in making a believer, and baptism together, and thus declares that, "unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God." So it stood then, and so it ought to be now.

This is the same in substance as the commission--Mark 16: 16--"He that believes and is immersed shall be saved." Here we have the literal words, "believe" and "immerse," instead of the figurative words, "born of water and of the Spirit," and connecting the same two things, belief and immersion, together in order to the same end. Find out what the faith is for, in this sentence, or what it is in order to, and you find out what the immersion is for, or is in order to. The same connection that shows what one is in order to, shows what the other is in order to. They are both in order to salvation. Let us discriminate, the salvation here spoken of is not the eternal salvation; for many men believe, and are immersed, who go away into sin and never obtain the eternal salvation. It is pardon--an immediate salvation from sin. He that believes and is immersed shall be pardoned. This is the same in substance as the other passages consulted; for saved or pardoned implies "in Christ," or "in the Church," or kingdom; for all who are saved are in Christ, in the Church, in the kingdom. [84]

Acts 2: 38 is the same in substance: "Repent and be immersed every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, in order to the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." "In order to the remission of sins," or "into the remission of sins," is the same in amount as into justification, into reconciliation, or into Christ; for all who have remission of sins are justified, are in Christ, in the Church, in the kingdom, having been immersed into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason why we have the words in the commission: "Immersing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It is into the new state or relation, union with the Father, union with the Son, and union with the Holy Spirit, which, in substance, is the same as in Christ, in the Church, in the kingdom; for all who are immersed into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, are in Christ, in the Church, in the kingdom, or they are pardoned and adopted.

"Immersed into one body"--1 Cor. 12: 13--is the same in substance, for all in the "one body" are in the kingdom, pardoned, justified. All these passages show that immersion is the initiatory rite, the act in which the transfer is made "into Christ," "into one body," "into the kingdom of God," "into remission of sins," "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," amounting to the same as into a state of justification. In the act of believing, the sinner is only prepared in his heart for the transfer into the one body, or into the kingdom, but not actually transferred. In the act of repenting, the sinner is prepared only in his life or character, for the transfer into one body, into the kingdom, or into remission of sins, but not actually transferred. But in the act of immersion the penitent, whose heart has been prepared for the transfer into the new state by faith, and whose life has been prepared for the transfer by repentance, is, in truth and in fact, transferred "into Christ," "into one body," "into the kingdom of God," "into the remission of sins," "into [85] the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

You, therefore, never read of believing into one body, repenting into one body, or praying into one body. The reason is that, by the acts of believing, repenting, praying or communion, no one is transferred into

the one body. Believing, repenting, praying, communion, etc., are all right, and must be in their place; but no one of them is the initiatory rite, or the act in which the transfer into the new state or relation is made. Believing goes before the transfer, and prepares the sinner, in heart, for the transfer. Repentance goes before the transfer, and prepares the sinner, in life, for the transfer. Praying and communion, singing and rejoicing, are acts of devotion for those already transferred, or those in the one body--in the kingdom. Immersion is the act in which the transfer is made. Hence, persons are "immersed into one body," "into the remission of sins," "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This accounts for another thing, viz.: that we are to be immersed but once. If immersion were in the Church, if it were a "religious duty," a "Church ordinance," a "Christian duty," there would be set times when it should be performed, as the communion, again and again. But this is not the case. By common consent, all agree that it is never to be repeated. The reason of this is, we enter into the one body, or kingdom, but once. The act or rite in which we are transferred into the new state is never repeated, because we never enter into Christ, into the body or name, but once. The rite or act in which we enter is, therefore, never needed but once.

If any one of our readers is still troubled about the design of immersion, please turn to the words, "Repent and be immersed," and leave the word immerse out for the time being, and read the passage without it, and see if you can determine what repentance is for or in order to. No doubt, you will find the design of it in an instant. Thus read it now and look at it: "Repent [86] every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, in order to the remission of sins." What is the repentance in order to? You answer, "In order to the remission of sins." Now, leave out the word "repent," and read again. The same words that told what repentance was in order to, will now tell what immersion is in order to. It will then read, "Be immersed, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, in order to the remission of sins." Then, certainly, when you have both repentance and immersion, the same connecting words tell what they both stand for or in order to.

If you desire to examine the matter in the simplest form possible, turn to the commission--Mark 16: 16--and try it in the same manner. Let us see if we can learn what faith or believing is in order to or for. To this end we will read the passage without the words "and be immersed," so as to keep the eye on believing and find out precisely the design of it. It will then read, "He that believeth shall be saved." What is the believing for in order to? To being saved. Now let us read the passage without the word "believeth," and inserting the words omitted before, and the same words that told what believing is for will tell what immersion is for. It will then read, "He that is immersed shall be saved." What is the immersion in order to or for? To being saved. When believing and being immersed are both inserted, as the Lord arranged them, the words that tell what each is for, separately, tell with as much accuracy what both are for when used together. In the same sentence, in the same words, the Lord tells what both believing and being immersed are in order to or for. They are both in order to salvation. In the same way, the apostle--Acts 2: 38--in the same sentence, in precisely the same words, tells us what repentance and immersion are in order to. They are two steps in the same divine process, in order to the same end--pardon or justification.

"I should not know," says a man, "what Church to join, if I should concede that all is plain thus far." There need be no trouble about that. Follow out the [87] Scriptures that have been brought to your view, obey the gospel, and thus enter the Church of Christ, and then unite with the most convenient congregation of the members you can find, and remain with them till you die. You ought not to belong to any other body, or kingdom, than the body of Christ.

"But how would I decide what creed to adopt?" There need be no trouble about this. All parties agree that the creed the nearest like the Bible is the nearest right. The reason of this is, that the Bible is right. Then, if the creed the nearest like the Bible is the nearest right, and will do at all, because it is so near right, the Bible itself, which is precisely right, will do! If it is safe to adopt a creed nearly like the Bible, and consequently nearly right, it is infallibly safe to adopt the Bible, which is precisely right.

"But I can not understand the whole Bible." No matter if you can not understand half of it. There is not one ray of light from heaven for the children of men, except what comes from the Bible. What understanding you have of the Bible, or what light you have received from it, directly and indirectly, is all the light you have shining along your pathway to the skies; and what light you shall, directly and indirectly, derive from the same divine source, is all the light you will ever have to guide you to the everlasting city.

"But why did not somebody among the great men, good and true, who have lived in the last three hundred years, find out these things and adopt the Bible as their only guide," says one, "before our time?" It would be hard to tell why. It is hard to tell why the art of printing was not discovered till a modern date; why they did not make gunpowder at an earlier day, or in some other country; why the wisdom of the world failed to apply steam power before the year 1800; and why railroads and telegraphs were never brought into use till our day. It would be equally hard to give the reason why a thousand other things were not discovered sooner. Why did not some mighty reformer rise before Luther, in Germany; before Calvin, in France; or [88] Wesley, in England? The human mind is so constituted that it can not bound from the depths of Romish darkness and, at one single leap, reach the full-orbed light of apostolic times in religious matters. It required many efforts, in different parts of the world, to reach the grand consummation. The truth is, at times, men did appear to see the ground, but they did not find strength to stand up to it and maintain it. Chillingworth is probably the author of the sublime declaration: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants." But neither he, nor his friends who admired his statement, appeared to appreciate what was contained in it.

John Wesley said, commending his General Rules for his "societies," as he styled the little parties with which he first commenced holding meetings for prayers, for a deeper work of grace, "most of which we are taught of God to observe, even in His written word, which is the sufficient rule and the infallible rule both for our faith and practice." In the Methodist discipline, the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, and the Episcopal Prayer Book, we have the following:--"The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation, so that whatever is not read therein, or may not be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith or thought necessary to salvation." On the fifth page of Wesley's Notes to his new translation of the New Testament, he says: "Would to God that all party names were forgot, and that we, as humble, loving disciples, might sit down together at the Master's feet, read His Holy Word, imbibe His Spirit, and transcribe His life in our own." Numerous utterances of this description are found in the writings of the most distinguished men who lived from one to two hundred and fifty years ago. The quotations just made are from memory, and may not be precisely word for word, but are, in substance, correct. Will you please hear Paul on the same subject? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, [89] for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work."--2 Tim. 3: 16. What more can the man of God need than the teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, thus being thoroughly furnished for every good work. Thus has our kind heavenly Father fitted his children to serve him and prepare themselves for glory and honor. What an act of rebellion it is, on the part of any man or set of men, to assume that the law of God is not sufficient for the government of the saints, and to guide

them to peace and happiness, and assume that uninspired men can make a law sufficient for this purpose, and undertake to do it! Yet, this is done in every instance where a human creed is imposed on men for their government or guide.

In this great matter of man's salvation, there should be no risks taken, no experiments made, no trifling. Each person has but the one life to live in this state, but one soul to be saved or lost, but one heaven to be gained or missed, and there should be no uncertainty in the matter. Our heavenly Father has made a will: and if he has not set out the matter in His will, told us how to gain the inheritance, then no one can tell us how. If he has not given us instructions to guide us to glory and honor, no man can give us instructions. When His Son, our Lord, Emanuel, God with us, was transfigured in the presence of three of His disciples as witnesses, the Jehovah said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased; hear you him." This commandment to "hear him," can be carried out in no way but by adhering to what He has authorised to be said, as we find it recorded in Scripture. He says Himself, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me." Again he says, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to Me."

The time has now come, in the good providence of God, when the teaching of our Lord and His apostles is to be separated from the teachings and commandments of men, and when our Lord Jesus the Christ is [90] to be held up and an effort made to draw all men to Him. Those for Him, His gospel, His teaching, and that of His apostles, are now calling for His friends to come out, stand by Him, and rally to His standard, maintain His gospel and teaching, take on them His name, and stand up for everything as it came from Him and His inspired apostles. If he is not an infallible guide, there is no infallible guide. If the teaching of Jesus and His apostles is not infallibly safe, then there is no safe teaching. If it will not guide us to heaven and eternal felicity, then there is no teaching that will guide us there.

Take, then, the teaching, the divine and infallible teaching of Jesus and the apostles, read it, fill your memory with it, cherish it in your heart, meditate on it, delight in it, love it, and follow it with your whole mind and strength, and it will guide you peacefully, joyfully, and happily home to the haven of everlasting rest. Commend this teaching to your children, and children's children, that they may love and follow it when you are gone to rest. Commend it to the world around you, and exhort them to transmit it from generation to generation till it shall reach the last child that shall be born of our race. It is our only source of instruction in the way of life. Directly and indirectly, all our light must come from it.

Thus we have shown, by many infallible proofs, that the way to God is plain--so plain, so simple, so easily understood, that no one need err. All truth in religion lies within the Bible. When it is our guide in religious matters, we are sure of being right, and need not err. It is our creed to be believed, our chart to guide our lives. It contains the assurance of pardon, justification, sanctification, and redemption. In the end, the promise of a glorious resurrection and life eternal beyond the grave.

To Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and made us priests to our God, be honor and power everlasting. [91]

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