

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE BAPTISMAL COMMAND.

## An Address

DELIVERED ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, MARCH 2ND, 1859, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” Acts x. 48.

Now there are three things that I wish this evening, as concisely as possible, and yet with great simplicity, to demonstrate unto you. The first is *the persons or characters so commanded*; the second is, *what they were to do*: they were to be baptized; and third, *the authority by which this command is given*.

I. The first thing is THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS WHO WERE THUS COMMANDED. And the word of God, and the word of God only, is in all matters pertaining to eternity to be our guide. You will find in all the Scriptures, if we take the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, you will find in all these that the persons baptized were partakers of the Holy Ghost: that they were real Christians. Take for instance, in the first place Matthew iii. there “They were baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins;” they know what they were as sinners. If you ask, to what extent they knew what they were as sinners? the answer is that as this ordinance sets forth the death and resurrection of Christ, and therefore the substitutional work of Christ, for he died not for himself, the Messiah was not cut off for himself, he was cut off for sinners; therefore, when it is said, “they were confessing their sins,” the meaning is, that they were sensible of their need of that which is indicated by this ordinance; they were sensible of their need of a substitute; and that substitute is the Lord Jesus Christ; “He bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” That is one feature of the character. And every one of the candidates coming forward this evening, have given proof that they do feel their need of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that they do see forgiveness in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; and if they see no more than this, if they feel no more than this, if they are brought thus far, and only thus far, on the heavenly road, they are in the right path, in that way in which by degrees there will yet be unfolded to them the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of God, that passeth knowledge. And you will find that in the same chapter, where those who were baptized, were baptized confessing their sins; in that same chapter, it is indicated that the same persons

No. 11.

were the children of Abraham spiritually, that they were persons of the same faith, and brought into the bond of the same immutable covenant. I will appeal to the candidates, as well as to the assembly at large, upon this point; and there is not one out of the 45 candidates now before us, who has not been brought to receive, in the love of it too, the testimony of God's immutable covenant: He swore by himself, because he could swear by no greater—they are therefore brought into the bond of the same covenant as was Abraham; and therefore are the children of Abraham. And in that same chapter it is indicated also that they are good trees, bringing forth good fruit, bringing forth fruits meet for repentance; that is to say, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; faith is a fruit, a consequence, of the work of the Blessed Spirit, and love to the Lord, and decision for him, and obedience to his glorious commands. Therefore, the first feature of the character of those who have any right to be baptized, is that conviction of sin which brings them down to the Saviour's feet, brings them into the bond of God's covenant. But then to be brought thus down to the Saviour's feet, and to be brought to receive the truth of God's immutable covenant in the love of it, and to be beyond doubt or fear, assured of interest in it, are two distinct things. You read in the Ephesians, that it was after they believed that they were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. Ah, my hearers, there is no authority in the Scriptures to baptize any but those that the Bible describes; we have no authority, either by description or direction, or command, or example. Then if I go to Matthew xxviii. I shall find the same idea kept up there: it says, "Go, and, teach all nations, baptizing them." First, here is the teaching. And we well know what their teaching was: their teaching was repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: that was their teaching: their teaching was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Their teaching also was that, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Therefore, on looking at Matthew iii. you see there are features given of character; on looking at Matthew xxviii. you again see that there are features given of character; it is those that are *taught*; that is, taught of God; for when the Lord sent his apostles to teach he sent them only as ministers; they could preach the word, but it laid entirely with the Lord to direct the word where it seemed good in his sight, to take out of the Gentiles a people for his name. Then, if I pass by the 1st chapter of Mark, which perhaps I ought not to do, but I will for the sake of conciseness, and come to the last chapter of Mark, what do we get there? We get in Matthew iii. confession of sin; we get in Matthew xxviii. divine teaching; and in the last chapter of Mark we get these words, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Now to be baptized in that day was publicly to own the Lord Jesus Christ; and so it is now, with this difference, that a man could not publicly own the Saviour by baptism in that day, without risking both his liberty and his life. And therefore the meaning of that Scripture is, that he that believeth, and is not ashamed to own it, is not ashamed of the ordinances connected with that salvation, is not ashamed to own the ministers connected with that salvation,

is not ashamed to own the doctrines connected with it, is not ashamed to own the precepts connected with it, is not ashamed to own the public ordinances connected with that salvation—he shall be saved; shewing, that where true faith is, there they may for a time hang back through the fear of man, yet they will be so unhappy that by and bye they will break every bond, and like Samson, snap every withe and cord asunder, and come forth boldly declaring themselves on the Lord's side. And hence there were Publicans in those days, that looked not much perhaps after the applause of men, when they were brought to believe, they were baptized at once; but the Sadducees and Pharisees you read of in Luke vii. "Rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not being baptized with John's baptism." I understand that in this way, that these Pharisees and Sadducees were what we should call the respectable of the world; so though they believed in Christ—for you will read in another place of many that believed in him, but they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, notwithstanding their belief in Jesus Christ;—though they believed in Christ, and would do very well if they might remain in private, yet to come forth in public, and lose their living in the church, the state church, and to lose their standing in society, and to lose a great deal by it,—no, this we do not do; we are too wise for that; we will go to heaven, if you like, but we will lose nothing by the way; we are not going to degrade ourselves in the eyes of the world by coming to your baptism. "And therefore they rejected the counsel of God, not being baptized of John's baptism." I don't know what some of you pædo-Baptists think of such Scriptures, but I hope before I've done my address to make some of you anti-Baptists feel exceedingly uneasy.

Now, it is said of the Publicans that they justified God in being baptized with John's baptism; they justified God, and why? Because God had justified them; and therefore they justified God. But again, pass from these Scriptures to the Acts of the Apostles, and I shall again meet with character there—"They were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do? Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." Now what was that word? Why, the substance of the Pentecostal sermon was taken from Psalm xvi, where the Saviour appears in his glorious substitutional character,—“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.” Ah, for whom did he go into the hell of God's wrath; for whom did he go into the hell of our sins? For us, not for himself. “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Now, these people of Jerusalem were brought to feel their need of Christ; and you may almost hear one wounded person, pricked in the heart, saying, “Oh, thou wilt leave my soul in hell; I shall see eternal corruption; thou wilt not show me the path of life; I shall not come into thy presence, where there is fulness of joy; I shall be banished from thy presence for ever; I shall not be where there are pleasures for evermore; but I shall be where there are pains for evermore.

Thus they were pricked in their hearts. Let us ask, cannot the Candidates join in this? Can they not truly say that they have seen themselves, and felt themselves to be in this condition, namely, that they can have no hope apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. But, when we look away from the position and awful state we are in as sinners, and then look at the dear Saviour coming into this hell for us, coming to the hell of our sins for us, when we see him rise triumphant from the dead, when we see him ascended on high, when we see him comforted on every side, what shall we do then? Now, mark, when they were thus brought to see where, and what they were as sinners, then when they looked at the Lord Jesus Christ, "They gladly received his word." Oh, is there one that has taken my hell? Is there One that has swallowed up my corruption, so that I shall see an end to corruption? Is there One that has borne all my griefs, and carried all my sorrows; and not only so, but is there One that has laid up for me a fulness of joy, a thing never known in this world since the fall took place? Is there a Person who will bring me into these pleasures for ever more? What shall I do to glorify him? What are his commandments? If he makes a solemn appeal, "If ye love me"—love thee! Can I know such a Saviour, and not love him? It is just utterly impossible. Why, the very first question, was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" How clearly then we have, at the church of Jerusalem, distinction of character, as to who the persons were, that were to be baptized. Again, we come to Acts viii. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them; and the Lord wrought great wonders, and there was great joy in that city;" and the people were baptized there. And what caused the joy? "He preached Christ unto them;" that caused the joy. Just so now, there is nothing will cause so much joy to a poor sinner, as the Lord Jesus Christ, revealed as the end of the law for righteousness; as that wondrous Person who hath finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness. Again, we go a little farther on in that chapter, and here is a person who had been to Jerusalem; he had been to church, that is a fact, he had been to church; and he heard people read something, he hardly knew what; he could not get what he wanted. "And the Spirit said unto Philip, go near and join thyself to his chariot." He was riding along, and reading aloud, as was then, and still is, the custom in the east; and therefore, Philip could hear him; and he said, "Understandest thou what thou readest? How can I, except some man should guide me? come up into the chariot." He was reading that wondrous chapter, Isaiah liii.; "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water;" and the heart of the Eunuch was so warmed, so delighted,—Oh, what a wondrous Person, what a Plant of Renown; what a wondrous Person; not only to pour out his soul unto death, but also to make intercession for the transgressors, to go on interceding and interceding until he shall finally bring them all off victorious. Oh, has he left any commands? Yes. He has commanded us to "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Well, said the Eunuch, "See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" "If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest." Thus we see then, friends, whether multitudes or individuals, there is always a distinction of character. "If thou believest with all thy heart." Can you say that to an infant? Certainly not. Can you say that to the carnal man? Certainly not.

Then again, we go on a little further in the Acts of the Apostles; and here is a vile persecutor. A voice came from heaven, "Saul." He trembled; he

knew not which way to look, he knew not what to do; he was paralysed. After a few moments, or perhaps a few minutes, the solemn voice came again; "Saul!" He fell to the ground. "Who art thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." He was stopped. "Go into Damascus, into the street called Straight." There he remained till he was raised up into the knowledge and enjoyment of eternal mercy; and was then and there baptized. "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." His sins were washed away essentially by the blood of Christ, and they were washed away testimonially by his going through the ordinance. And those who deny this ordinance, and hold with sprinkling, it is almost saying, I am not such a sinner but that just a little sprinkling will do for me. Ah!—the song in heaven will suit us Baptists much better than you anti-Baptists; why you will hardly know how to sing it. "Unto him that loved us," and *sprinkled* us from our sins. No. "Unto him that loved us, and *washed* us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever." Again, if I come to the Philippian jailor, there is distinction of character there also. "What must I do to be saved?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "And he was baptized, he and all his, straightway." Then, if I come to the chapter wherein is my text, when the Apostle went down to Cæsarea, we find again, distinction of character; when they had received the Holy Ghost, they were baptized. Now, friends, then, these Scriptures that I have named will prove that persons baptized in the life-time of the Saviour, and persons baptized as spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles, all of them were persons born of God, with the exception of persons who came in deceitfully, as in the case of Simon Magus, Ananias, Sapphira, Demas, and others; but these are no exception to God's rule. He permitted these to take place: he permitted these deceptions to take place in the early age of the Church, in order that the judgments upon these may be set up as beacons afterwards to check the presumptuous, and to make the Churches of Jesus Christ cautious and careful as to the kind of character they receive; for if we build a house with hay, wood, straw and stubble, though mingled with some solid materials, yet it will not stand the fire nor the storm. And therefore these apparent exceptions are no exceptions at all. Then, if I am right in my idea that all the persons that were baptized were Christians, then it follows that they were all partakers of the Holy Ghost; in fact no man can be a regenerated man, but by the Spirit of God.

I have said that this ordinance of baptism sets forth the death and resurrection of Christ; but not the death and resurrection of Christ only; it sets forth the work of the blessed Spirit, as I shall presently shew, as well. We find that one part of the work of the Holy Spirit is called "the baptism of the Holy Ghost." Let us examine that matter. Now does that convey an idea of immersion? That is the first thing. The second question is, What is that baptism? In Acts 2 you find that when the Holy Ghost descended "it filled the house where they were sitting." That gives an idea of immersion. But let me just say to you, friends, that the baptism of the Holy Ghost, with one exception, and I will not—the Lord forbid I should set that exception aside, because that stands as no difficulty whatever to us—with one exception in the Scriptures, the baptism of the Holy Ghost relates not to his essential work of grace in the heart, mind this, but relates to special gifts, as the gift of tongues and the gift of healing, into which the soul was immersed—clothed and immersed into these gifts in the days of the Apostles. With one exception, the baptism of the Holy Ghost relates to miraculous gifts, confined entirely to the apostolic age, simply for the establishment of that dispensation, which the Lord then established, to remain down to the end of time. The exception you will find in 1 Cor. xii., where it is said,

“By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” There, the baptism of the Holy Ghost evidently relates to essential grace; so that some of my own brethren, who have contended that the baptism of the Holy Ghost always means, without exception, not his essential work, but miraculous gifts, I would wish they had not so contended; because we have nothing to do, but to admit the other idea. Well then, supposing it does not always mean miraculous gifts, how will you manage the matter then? In this way, that the promise of the Holy Spirit, as though they did not yet possess him, will mean the promise of an increase; it will mean, that they are to have the Holy Ghost in greater abundance than they have yet. And what is a remarkable thing—I should like every-one to take notice of it, it is a very striking thing.—now I will ask this assembly, is there one of you that would like to differ from the apostle Peter? Do you believe that when the apostle Peter was brought in the most wonderful way to Cæsarea—and he was brought there by the Holy Ghost—do you believe that when he spake to Cornelius, and those with him, he spake by the Holy Ghost? Why, say you, we cannot doubt that, because the Holy Spirit fell upon them at the time. You do admit that? Yes, we admit that. Well, then, how solemnly do you differ from him, when you bring forward a certain reason why you should not be baptized; for, say you, I have been baptized with the Holy Ghost, therefore I do not need to be baptized in water; so you make the baptism of the Holy Ghost, a reason why you should not be baptized, according to the Lord’s command, in water. But the apostle Peter makes the very same thing a reason why you *should* be baptized; for he says, “Can any man forbid water?” Come, you all understand what water means; if you don’t, look down, you will see some here, right before me—that’s water, that liquid before me, and you will see me in it presently. Well then, “Who can forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” So that the very reason you assign why you should *not* be baptized, is the very reason that Peter assigns why you *should* be baptized. Now, what do you say to this? I should not like to differ from Peter. I should like to differ from Peter where he swore not to have known the Lord; I wish to differ from him there; but not at all where he stands armed with the solemn credentials of eternity, and is brought into the Gentile world, of which we ourselves form a part, to establish the Christian dispensation, and to use that great argument, “Who can forbid water?” Why, really I should think that some of the fathers of you anti-Baptists must have been there; or if not, he must have anticipated that there would be some. But his argument, you see, is quite the reverse; “Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” Well but, say you, in almost all cases they received the Holy Ghost in his miraculous gifts, and so on, *after* the baptism. That does not alter it; if being baptized with the Holy Ghost is brought forward as an argument why you should be baptized in water, whether you have been baptized by him, or whether you are to be, there stands the fact, there stands the argument; overturn that argument if you can. Now I will just show a Scripture before I leave this point, wherein the Lord Jesus Christ promises the Spirit of God to persons as though they did not yet possess the Spirit; and yet in the same Scripture, he assures us that they do possess that Spirit; and the words are these: John xiv. “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth.” Now taking the words I have now quoted, does it not appear as if the Holy Ghost was not yet given to them? Why, say you, I don’t believe he was. Stop, my hearer, let us take the Lord’s own interpretation; “Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye

know him; for he *dwelleth* with you;" he is with you, mark that,—“and shall be in you.” So here is the declaration that he was with them, and yet should be with them. Therefore the promise, “I will send you another Comforter,” will not mean that they were not already partakers of the Holy Ghost; but it will mean, that they should have the Holy Ghost yet in greater abundance. I will say to you that are not Baptists, let me ask one favour of you; and that is this; whatever arguments you use against the ordinance of baptism, do not make use of God's own word against his own ordinances; for that is like making use of his word to patronise a false way, and to sanction that which he hates. I think I need say no more upon distinction of character, or to shew that those who were baptized in water were partakers of the Holy Ghost; and the apostle assigned it as a reason why they should be baptized, and not, as some assign it, as a reason why they should not be baptized.

II. The second point, on which I will be very brief, is THE MODE OF BAPTISM. How do we know it is by *immersion*? We get it from three sources; first, from the meaning of the word itself. The word itself means immersion. Secondly, we get it from the circumstances of baptizing. Is there not something almost absurd in the idea that Christ *came up out of the water* if baptism consists in sprinkling, or throwing a little water on their faces? Why, what are we to understand? He was baptized in Jordan. And Mark is very careful upon this. Oh, say some, I know that he was baptized in *the valley* of Jordan, by a little water sprinkled on him; that's all, sir—that's all it means. But, says Mark—and looking at the word I thought, why, Mark, you have just copied what Matthew said; but I looked again, and I found that Mark says he was baptized in *the river* Jordan. Well, you all know what a river is; I should not think you Pædo-baptists are such bad scholars as not to know what a river is; he was baptized in the *river* Jordan; and the river Jordan is not a very shallow river—not so shallow as your brains, I was going to say. And if a little sprinkling, or pouring would do, what need was there to go into the river Jordan? And then again, “they came to him, where there was *much water*.” Some say that will mean *many waters*. Will it? That will make it all the worse for you; if that word means half a dozen rivers instead of one, that will make it all the worse for you; depend upon it, you'd better leave it alone; the further you go, the further from truth you will get. Well then, again, if we come to the Eunuch, “They both went down *into the water*; and when he was come up *out of the water*, he went on his way rejoicing.” Now really, if baptism consisted in sprinkling, I should have nothing to do but just to get a little bunch of hysop, and walk round, and baptize the whole of you in a few minutes. But when we look at the circumstances of baptism in the Scriptures, we see that it must have consisted in immersion. Then again, would there not be an absurdity if it were not by immersion in the apostles calling it “*burying*?” The Apostle Paul says, “*Buried* with him in baptism.” Now you that hold with sprinkling, you could not say that your baby was *buried* in baptism, because you don't believe baptism to be a burying; but the apostle says, “*Buried* with him in baptism.” Oh, say you, but that is spiritual baptism. I don't mind which way you take it: there is the fact, that the apostle calls it a burying: whether his special object in that Scripture be to set forth the ordinance or the work of the Holy Spirit does not matter, it does not alter the fact: there stands the fact “*Buried* in baptism!” Then again, more solemn than all, oh ye that stand opposed to this ordinance, love the truth in every other respect, how can you read that great Scripture, how can you look at it, how can you shrink from it, how can you forget it, how can you banish it from your minds? I mean that solemn Scripture where Christ said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with: and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?” He was bound by solemn engagement to go into those

mighty deeps that must have carried us eternally away, and he was straitened by those solemn engagements until he had gone into those mighty deeps, and risen triumphant from the dead. And shall we fail in what he commanded us to pass through—a little cold water? Some people say, "Oh, the water is very cold, sir. Ah, you are making a mistake, you should not look upon the coldness of the water; I can find something else very much colder. You say, what is that? Why, your heart, sir; that's very much colder than the water. The water may be cold; but if you had a warm heart, you would not feel the coldness of the water; the coldness is in your heart. If the Lord were to baptize your soul with the fiery baptism of the Holy Ghost, and warm your heart, you would go through it, and look upon it as one of the most honorable steps you ever took in your life: and you would ever after look back to the time, and bless God for the grace to obey his holy will. So then there is distinction of character, and we see it is by immersion.

III. One more thought or idea: and that is THE COMMAND. Our text says, "He *commanded* them to be baptized." Here was no inviting, no reasoning, no wishing, no wooing; but "He *commanded* them." Ah, say you, but did they obey it? He took Cornelius on his own word: Cornelius, when Peter came used these words—and Cornelius was taught of God: he said, "We are all here before God to hear all things that are *commanded* thee of God." Was baptism one of those things? It looks like it: "For he commanded them to be baptized." Now let me go back to John xiv.; "If ye love me keep my commandments." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him." A little farther on in the same chapter it runs thus, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Much might I say upon the commandments of the Lord, were I to branch out on this point. Why, look at it; "he commanded them to be baptized." I cannot forbear saying, is it not infinitely condescending in the great God to have such a command for us? He might have commanded us into hell; he might have commanded us to appear at his solemn bar, with all our sins about us; he might have summoned us to appear before him and answer for all our sins; he might have summoned us into a vast eternity. But instead of this, here is a Surety for you: here is a Saviour for you: here is one that swallowed up death in victory for you: here is one that has accomplished the warfare for you: and he says, I command you merely to be baptized. I don't want you to do anything as a condition of salvation: but I want you to do something as an *acknowledgement* of salvation. I don't ask you to do anything as a condition of my grace and mercy, but I do want an acknowledgment of it: and therefore he "commanded them to be baptized:" and his command was by the authority of the Eternal Spirit.

If then you take these things into consideration: first, distinction of character; second, the proof that it is by immersion; and third, that it is the Lord's command—why if we have this evening, as we have, the authority of the Creator of the ends of the earth, the authority of Him that liveth and reigneth over all, why it must be pleasing and delightful. What is our religion if we do not love his commands? It is not worth having. And if there be some commands that we do not like, yet if we love him we shall obey him. Let then the Christian obey the Lord's will. He may sometimes dislike it; that will only shew more conspicuously the sincerity of his love to Him, by suffering for him and doing in a way of acknowledgement of him what flesh and blood does not like.