

THE  
**CHRISTIAN SYSTEM,**  
IN REFERENCE TO THE  
**UNION OF CHRISTIANS,**  
AND A  
**RESTORATION**  
OF  
**PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY,**  
AS PLEAD IN THE  
**CURRENT REFORMATION**

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BY A. CAMPBELL,

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### BAPTISM.

I. There are three things to be considered in baptism:--1. The action commanded to be done;--2. The subject specified;--3. The meaning or design of that action. Jesus commanded a certain *character* to be the subject of a certain *action*, for a certain specific purpose or *design*. The questions, then, are, What that action? What that subject? What that design?

#### 1ST. OF THE ACTION.

II. The action is indicated by a word as definite, clear, and unequivocal, as any word in any language ever spoken by the many-tongued sons of Adam. Besides, in all laws and institutions, and more especially in those that are of a *positive*, rather than a *moral* nature, all words having both a literal and a figurative meaning, a common and a special signification, are to be understood in their literal and common, and not in their figurative and uncommon import and acception. So have decided all the judges of law and language, from time immemorial.

III. That definite and unambiguous word, as almost universally known in these days of controversy, is *baptisma*, or *baptismos*, anglicised, not translated, *baptism*. The primary means by which the meaning of this word is ascertained are the following: 1. The ancient lexicons and dictionaries;--2. The ancient and modern translations of the New Testament;--3. The ancient customs of the church;--4. The place and circumstances of baptizing, as mentioned in the New Testament;--and 5. The allusions to this ordinance and the expositions of it in the apostolic epistles. To each of these we shall do little more than simply advert on the present occasion.

1. The ancient lexicons with one consent give *immersion* as the natural, common, and primary sense of this word. There is not known to us a single exception. Nor is there a received lexicon, ancient or modern, that does ever [57] translate this word by the terms *sprinkling* or *pouring*. And as there are but three *actions* allowed to be Christian baptism; and as the original words, both verbs and nouns are translated *immerse* and *immersion*, in all lexicons, and never *sprinkle* or *pour*; follows it not then, that neither sprinkling, nor pouring is Christian baptism? The question is not, whether these words are ever, like other words, used figuratively: whether they may not *metonymically* mean, *wetting* or *washing*; for these may be the effects of either sprinkling, pouring, or dipping. The question is not, whether these words may be so used: but the question is, whether the action commanded in *baptizo*, be sprinkling, pouring, or immersing a person. All authorized Greek dictionaries, ancient and modern, with one consent, affirm that action to be immersion; and not sprinkling or pouring.

2. All Latin, English, German and French versions which we have seen, and we believe on the testimony of others, all that we have not seen, sometimes translate these words, their derivatives, or compounds, by words equivalent to *immersion*: but on *no occasion* ever translate them by sprinkling, or pouring, or any other word equivalent to these terms. This is an evidence of great moment: for if these versions, have nineteen times in twenty been made by those who practise sprinkling or pouring in the name of the Lord; and if these words occur about one hundred and twenty times in the New Testament, is it not very singular that never once have such translators rendered the words by sprinkling, or pouring? a decisive proof in our judgment that it could not be so translated. Indeed, a mere English scholar, who has only heard that *baptism* is a Greek word, may indubitably ascertain that it means neither sprinkling nor pouring, by substituting the definition

of the term, and trying its sense in all places where the ordinance is spoken of. This is an infallible canon of interpretation. *The proper definition of a term substituted for it will always make as good sense as the term itself.* Now, if an English reader will try *sprinkling* or *pouring* in those places where he finds the word *baptism*, he will soon discover that neither of these words can possibly represent it, if the above canon be true. For instance, we are told, that all Judea and Jerusalem went out to John and were *baptized* of him in the Jordan. Sprinkled them *in* the Jordan! poured them *in* the Jordan! immersed them in the Jordan. Can any doubt, which of these truly represents the original in such passages? I may [58] sprinkle or pour water upon a person; but to sprinkle or pour them into water is impossible. It is not said he baptized water upon them, but he baptized them in water, in the river.

3. The ancient church, it is admitted on all hands, practised immersion. It did so, Roman, Greek and English historians being worthy of any credit.

4. The places where baptism was anciently administered, being rivers, pools, baths, and places of much water, show that it was not sprinkling or pouring. They went down *into* the water, and came up *out* of it, &c. And John baptized where there were many waters or much water. And even Paul and Silas went out of the Philippian jail to baptize the jailor at night, rather than send for a cup of water!

5. It is also alluded to and explained under the figure of a burial and resurrection, as relating to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, &c. [Rom. vi. and Col ii.](#)

From these topics many clear and conclusive arguments may be drawn, on which it is not now our business to dwell. If, indeed, any one of these five topics be correct, the action that Christ commands is forever decided. How much more, when they all concur in asserting the same interpretation! There is, then, but one baptism, and not two under the Christian administration.

#### THE SUBJECT OF BAPTISM.

IV. *Characters*, not *persons*, as such, are the subjects of baptism. *Penitent believers*--not infants nor adults, not males nor females, not Jews nor Greeks; but professors of repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ are the proper subjects of this ordinance. "To as many as received him, to them he granted privilege of becoming the sons of God, to them that believed on his name, which were born not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God." "He that believeth, and is baptized--not he that is baptized and believeth, shall be saved." "Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized," not many of the Corinthians were baptized and then believed, and finally heard the Gospel! "for without faith it is impossible to please God," &c.

#### THE MEANING OF BAPTISM.

V. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins." "And Jesus said that repentance and [59] remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Therefore, Peter said to the penitent Pentecostians, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins." Again, "As many of you as have been baptized or immersed into Christ, have put on Christ, have been immersed into his death;" "have risen with him."

VI. Baptism is, then, designed to introduce the subjects of it into the participation of the blessings of the death and resurrection of Christ; who "died for our sins," and "rose again for our

justification." But it has no abstract efficacy. Without previous faith in the blood of Christ, and deep and unfeigned repentance before God, neither immersion in water nor any other action can secure to us the blessings of peace and pardon. It can merit nothing. Still to the believing penitent it is the *means* of receiving a formal, distinct, and specific absolution, or release from guilt. Therefore, none but those who have first believed the testimony of God and have repented of their sins, and that have been intelligently immersed into his death, have the full and explicit testimony of God, assuring them of pardon. To such only as are truly penitent, dare we say, 'Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling upon the name of the Lord;' and to such only can we say with assurance, "You are washed, you are justified, you are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God." But let the reader examine with care our special essay on the [Remission of Sins](#), in which this much debated subject is discussed at considerable length.