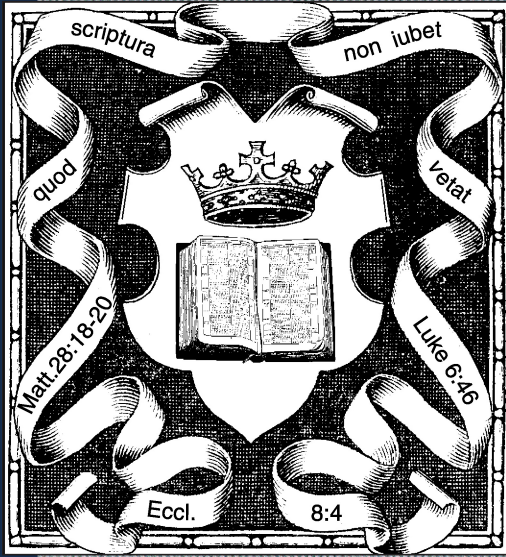
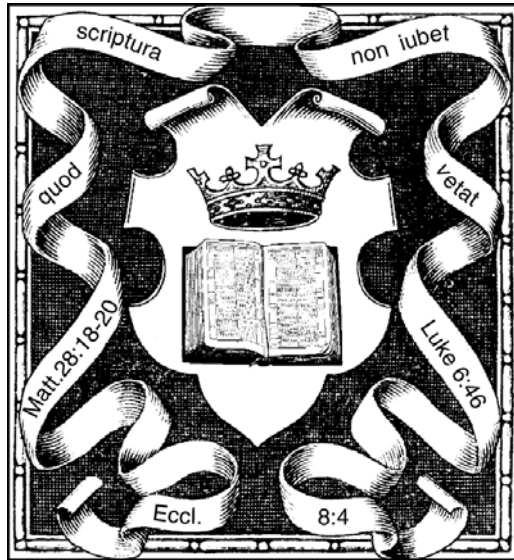


The Baptist Distinctives Series Number 48



Letters on Christian Baptism

John Flavel Bliss



Quod scriptura, non iubet velat

The Latin translates, “What is not commanded in scripture, is forbidden:”

On the Cover: Baptists rejoice to hold in common with other evangelicals the main principles of the orthodox Christian faith. However, there are points of difference and these differences are significant. In fact, because these differences arise out of God’s revealed will, they are of vital importance. Hence, the barriers of separation between Baptists and others can hardly be considered a trifling matter. To suppose that Baptists are kept apart solely by their views on Baptism or the Lord’s Supper is a regrettable misunderstanding. Baptists hold views which distinguish them from Catholics, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, and Presbyterians, and the differences are so great as not only to justify, but to demand, the separate denominational existence of Baptists. Some people think Baptists ought not teach and emphasize their differences but as E.J. Forrester stated in 1893, “Any denomination that has views which justify its separate existence, is bound to promulgate those views. If those views are of sufficient importance to justify a separate existence, they are important enough to create a duty for their promulgation ... the very same reasons which justify the separate existence of any denomination make it the duty of that denomination to teach the distinctive doctrines upon which its separate existence rests.” If Baptists have a right to a separate denominational life, it is their duty to propagate their distinctive principles, without which their separate life cannot be justified or maintained.

Many among today’s professing Baptists have an agenda to revise the Baptist distinctives and redefine what it means to be a Baptist. Others don’t understand why it even matters. The books being reproduced in the *Baptist Distinctives Series* are republished in order that Baptists from the past may state, explain and defend the primary Baptist distinctives as they understood them. It is hoped that this Series will provide a more thorough historical perspective on what it means to be distinctively Baptist.

The Lord Jesus Christ asked, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). The immediate context surrounding this question explains what it means to be a true disciple of Christ. Addressing the same issue, Christ’s question is meant to show that a confession of discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ is inconsistent and untrue if it is not accompanied with a corresponding submission to His authoritative commands. Christ’s question teaches us that a true recognition of His authority as Lord inevitably includes a submission to the authority of His Word. Hence, with this question Christ has made it forever impossible to separate His authority as King from the authority of His Word. These two principles—the authority of Christ as King and the authority of His Word—are the two most fundamental Baptist distinctives. The first gives rise to the second and out of these two all the other Baptist distinctives emanate. As F.M. Jans wrote in 1894, “Loyalty to Christ as King, manifesting itself in a constant and unswerving obedience to His will as revealed in His written Word, is the real source of all the Baptist distinctives:’ In the search for the *primary* Baptist distinctive many have settled on the Lordship of Christ as the most basic distinctive. Strangely, in doing this, some have attempted to separate Christ’s Lordship from the authority of Scripture, as if you could embrace Christ’s authority without submitting to what He commanded. However, while Christ’s Lordship and Kingly authority can be isolated and considered essentially for discussion’s sake, we see from Christ’s own words in Luke 6:46 that His Lordship is really inseparable from His Word and, with regard to real Christian discipleship, there can be no practical submission to the one without a practical submission to the other.

In the symbol above the Kingly Crown and the Open Bible represent the inseparable truths of Christ’s Kingly and Biblical authority. The Crown and Bible graphics are supplemented by three Bible verses (Ecclesiastes 8:4, Matthew 28:18-20, and Luke 6:46) that reiterate and reinforce the inextricable connection between the authority of Christ as King and the authority of His Word. The truths symbolized by these components are further emphasized by the Latin quotation - *quod scriptura, non iubet vetat*— *i.e.*, “What is not commanded in scripture, is forbidden:’ This Latin quote has been considered historically as a summary statement of the regulative principle of Scripture. Together these various symbolic components converge to exhibit the two most foundational Baptist Distinctives out of which all the other Baptist Distinctives arise. Consequently, we have chosen this composite symbol as a logo to represent the primary truths set forth in the *Baptist Distinctives Series*.

LETTERS
ON
CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

LETTERS
ON
CHRISTIAN BAPTISM,
AS THE
INITIATING ORDINANCE INTO THE REAL
KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

ALSO,

ON THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE KINGDOM AS ORGANIZED BY CHRIST,
AND THE PRESENT SECTARIAN STATE OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD.

BY JOHN FLAVEL BLISS, A.M.

Late Pastor of several Congregational and Presbyterian Churches, in Western New York.

With a Biographical Sketch of the Author by John Franklin Jones

Addressed to all his Christian Friends and Acquaintance.

HIGH TREASON is the crime of injured majesty.

High treason against the King of Zion, is where the crime is against either the Person of the King—his Kingdom—his dominion—his laws—the oath of allegiance to Him, against proper persons taking it, against the union of all his people under him, within his own Fold, or against his exclusive jurisdiction over them.

To build up other Folds, under other Rulers, is High Treason.

Whosoever either aids, abets, or in any way assists in a crime, is as really guilty as a principal, and is equally liable to the penalty.

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Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth.

— *Psalms 66:4*

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THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

ISBN# 1579786383

LETTERS

On **CHRISTIAN BAPTISM**, as the initiating ordinance into the real Kingdom of Christ:

On the alterations of it, by Despotie Powers, in principle and in form, and the misapplication of Baptism, and the substitute, to improper subjects, enforced by the same powers, for sectarian purposes, and the delusions accompanying:

On the **REAL KINGDOM OF CHRIST**, exclusively under his own jurisdiction, into which Christian Baptism introduces the Convert:

On the extent to which that Kingdom has been **BROKEN DOWN**, by the formation of rival folds, under rival rulers, accomplishing their ends by stratagem, and the substitute for Baptism:

On the **CONTRAST** between that Kingdom, so organized, by Christ himself, and the present scattered state of the sheep, into folds the devices of men, and under rival and competing Rulers:

On the **ORIGIN** and **ILLEGITIMACY** of those folds contrived by men, and confining the Sheep away from the rightful Shepherd's jurisdiction, and under the jurisdiction of those who have no right to control them; and the treasonable position of such folds, as rivals against the Fold of Christ, and as obstacles in the way of its prevalence:

On the **CRUELTY** of that use of the substitute for Baptism which makes unconscious and helpless babes, Church members, in such folds as are the inventions of men, and ruled by men, and at antipodes against the One Fold of Christ; thus hindering them, when converted, from Christian Baptism, and from going into the Fold of Christ, under his exclusive jurisdiction, and thus inclining the babe, through delusion, deception, and stratagem, to remain in a treasonable state of rivalry against the Fold of Christ during all his life, breeding and perpetuating divisions, "not knowing what he does:"

And on the **DIVISIONS** in the Zion of God, traced to their true origin; and the true scriptural basis of **CHRISTIAN UNION**, to which Christians must necessarily come, before they can ever be **ONE** again, as they were during the first and second centuries of the Christian era.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

UTICA, October 26, 1840.

DEAR BROTHER HILL.—I have been highly gratified with the lucid, scriptural view of the Kingdom of Christ, presented in the Letters of brother Bliss; and in this, as well as in many other particulars, I deem them an invaluable acquisition to Baptist literature and the cause of truth. On no subject do the Christian community need instruction more than on this: and brother Bliss has been peculiarly happy and discriminating in the discussion. Some of our own brethren may be greatly helped by a close attention to brother Bliss' expose.

Yours truly, A. M. BEEBEE.

From Gerrit Smith, Esq., to the Author, after reading part of these Letters.

"You have certainly furnished no small amount of evidence that *infant baptism*, and *sprinkling*, are but *human inventions*. I have long suspected that *they were no better*. I should like to know for a certainty, '*what is truth*' on the subject, that I might act accordingly. If immersion be necessary to constitute valid scriptural baptism, then do I earnestly desire to be immersed myself. But I seem never to have had sufficient leisure for the due examination of this subject; or rather, perhaps, I have never attached sufficient importance to it. I admit that it is important to know the Saviour's own mode; and that knowing it, it is *sin to refuse to conform to it*."

From the Editor of the New-York Baptist Register, July 10.

"The applications for the republication of these letters, have been such, that the author will probably be induced to consider them, and give to the public his labors in a more permanent shape. No doubt there will be a careful revision. —Individuals who have been liberated from the power of tradition, after a long period of thralldom—when their eyes are fully opened, and God gives them to see the delusion, the utter absurdity of it fills them with amazement; and they are surprised their former associates do not see as well as themselves. When we consider the almost indescribable interest such persons feel in behalf of their brethren they have left in error, Br. Bliss' plainness will no doubt be pardoned. In regard to redundancy, Br. Bliss had his object. He knew that many required the subject to be presented in a great variety of points of light—and he cared not if he sometimes seemed repetitious, so he effected his object, in making the truth irresistible.

"In these letters, we must say, with hundreds of our brethren who will unite with us, there is a distinctness and definiteness of position given to the Church of Jesus Christ, and a contrast drawn with illegitimate associations rarely to be met with; and some who have indulged in the charge of redundancy here, we have no doubt might go over them again to great advantage, and learn still more of the nature and Kingdom of Christ. Even Baptists, in many instances, have but muddy views of the nature of this kingdom, and are too often disposed to jumble it up with anything and everything that has in it a moral blending. A multitude of contentions and difficulties have arisen from such confused and imperfect apprehensions, which a clear perception of its character would have prevented. If there was nothing in the work but this, we would give it wings to speed its flight in every region."

From the same, of October 16, 1840.

“These letters must be an invaluable addition to any Library. They exhibit the whole subject of the contrast between the original Kingdom of Christ, and the present scattered state of the sheep into human folds, in a clear, concise and forcible light.”

From the same, of October 23, 1840.

“We are indeed highly gratified to receive the intelligence of the prospect of their publication. Many of our readers also, who have been so anxious for their re-publication, in a revised form, will be no less gratified. There is no publication that we have on the subject of the ordinances of Christ’s house that can supply their place.”

*From the Livingston Baptist Ministerial Conference, prepared
by REV. E. STONE.*

“Every man is under moral obligation to vindicate the cause of truth.— We seem afraid to attempt the removal of the scales from the eyes of others, lest we lose their friendship. While errors have been flooding churches, now and then a bold champion, like Luther, has ventured forth to stem the torrent of error, for which they have been fined, imprisoned, and burnt at the stake. Brother Bliss, it is true, is not terrified at the fires of Smithfield; still, it needs some moral courage to step forth before the world to say what he has. The subject has been handled without gloves. It needed handling with a fearless pen. It may be asked, Has not the Editor of the Register spoken the minds of the denomination generally with regard to the Letters? If so, why say any more? Has not Brother Bliss written “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?” Grant this: but does brother Bliss *know* that the people to whom he belongs will bear him out in *publishing* what he has written? The approbation of his own conscience is his best security—still, he must desire to know the feelings of his brethren. For ourselves, we feel under obligations to the author of those Letters, and wish to contribute our mite towards discharging the debt. He must desire to know, in addition to what the Editor has well said, that what he has fearlessly written ought to be spread before the Christian public.—We believe Brother Beebee has expressed the views of our denomination, &c.

*From the Rev. William Sands, Editor of the Religious Herald,
Richmond, Virginia.*

“Brother Bliss has entered into a full and thorough investigation of this subject, especially on infant baptism. He has, we think, overthrown the arguments usually adduced in favor of this tradition of the fathers. These letters have already undeceived several as to this delusion. The re-publication of them has been strongly urged, and we are glad the request has been acceded to. We hope they will yet do more good, in opening the eyes of the supporters of infant sprinkling, and cause them to renounce their unscriptural theory.

PREPARATORY STATEMENT.

The writer aims solely at usefulness, in defending the rights of Jesus Christ, against the invaders of his prerogative, and in defending the best interests of all his people. In ordering them all to be "gathered together in one," within "one Fold," and under "one Shepherd," by "one baptism"—to have but "one Lord," and "no divisions," and in praying so earnestly; "that they all might be one," the Saviour himself displayed the most benevolent design.

The building up of illegitimate folds, under human rulers, is certainly waging war with this most benevolent arrangement of the Redeemer.

The writer was deluded when a youth, by what was falsely called infant *baptism*—his confidence secured in the usual way; his reading was entirely on one side till he was 45 years of age. He took unwearied pains to become master of all the published arguments on that side; and, (as he now believes,) because of an unconquerable anxiety to obtain more satisfactory and sound arguments, and not because he began, even during all that time, to suspect that system.

His confidence in the sprinkling of babes was first shaken in an effort to defend it, against the attack of it, by an intelligent Baptist Minister, within his parish.

His mind was uneasy for nearly a year, and was searching for scriptural and historical proof: but in vain. At length he gave up to a determination to follow truth, let it lead where it would, and let it cost what it might. Soon the bubble burst. Yet, it was not till he had carefully written out a literal translation from the Greek Testament of every passage that relates to baptism, and collected them, so as to have a clear view of the mind of the Spirit. It was six months more

before his mind became adjusted, against the influence of all his former prejudices, in relation to Baptism.

Most gladly would he have kept quiet, if he dared. But as he saw, through this his delusion, he had exerted a wrong influence in the Kingdom of Christ, he felt that he must counteract it, let it cost what it might.

It was a costly transaction. To feel obliged to condemn one's former principles, so often and so publicly defended—to cease all further services with the churches, and feel obliged to refuse all invitations—to remain ostensibly *laid up* for one or two years, in private studies—to feel obliged, by convictions of truth, to join the “sect which is every where spoken against”—and to turn the back upon all one's former associates and spiritual interests, and to expose one's self to all the obloquy or persecution that *might* follow, and to contravene the tenderest feelings of one's own dear family, is one of the greatest trials in the world. Reader, infant sprinkling, and the accompanying delusions, which turn us into a fold the device of men, instead of the One Fold of Christ, is the cause of all this trouble, as well as of most of the divisions in the Zion of God.

Regard for truth—for the rights of Jesus Christ—for his exclusive jurisdiction, and for his regulations for the best interests of his people, constrained the author to take the course he has.

As the subject matter of the one fold of Christ, his title to all the sheep, and to exclusive jurisdiction, and the tendency of infant sprinkling to build up and continue the competing folds of men, and thus to breed and perpetuate divisions, and keep the dear friends of Christ in separate folds, in future ages, and prevent them from ever being One under Christ, rose to view in a clearer and more forcible light, he felt constrained to write a few friendly letters on the subject, to Christian friends, his former associates. As he continued to write, the subject swelled and enlarged to the present size.

He is happy to say that he has certainly no less friendship

for his former associates, but an increase—and he knows not that there is any diminution on the part of his former associates, unless it be in a few cases.

As friends insisted the letters should be published, he has finally consented, in the hope they may be of use to the bleeding cause of Christ, and to those minds that are anxious to know the truth. Perfection in thought or expression cannot be expected. He will cheerfully correct errors, as soon as convinced of them.

A generous public are requested candidly to reflect on the scope of the thoughts and arguments, and not to be fastidious on little points; and to recollect it is the rights of Jesus Christ, the great Redeemer, that we wish to defend.

To the influence of the Holy Spirit, who will *always* accompany his own truth, to the consciences and hearts of those to whom it is presented, unless through prejudice and rebellious hearts, they grieve him away, this work is devoutly commended, praying that he will guide all who read in the right ways of the Lord.

If the writer in any thing seems pointedly severe, it is not because of any lack of tenderness to those who differ, but because he feels for the bleeding cause of Christ, and feels a holy indignancy against the propagation of those delusions that are breeding so many divisions, and are so perfectly unfounded in the word of God, and mislead so many excellent minds, during all their lives, and often lead them to do more hurt than good, notwithstanding they have good intentions.

If a Minister or a Christian support, during all his life, either the treasonable jurisdiction of the Pope over Christianity—or that of the National Governments—or that of the Civil and Episcopal Government of England—or that of the Episcopal Government in the United States, or that of the Presbyterian Aristocracies—or that of the Methodist Episcopal Bishops, and subordinate rulers, or that of any other competing fold, or jurisdiction, that hinders the unlimited, unri-

valled, and exclusive jurisdiction of Jesus Christ, over his own cause, and supports the great feeder, or supply, of all this treason, the making of babes Church members, within these folds, by stratagem, when helpless; and if he supports the deluding of parents, by false pretences, and the making of them the blind and cruel agents in enslaving their own children, in this way; it is a matter of serious doubt whether he does not perform more evil than good, during his life, notwithstanding he may have good intentions, and may actually accomplish a great deal of good. The author now looks back upon his own misguided course, in this mirror, with serious regret. Minister of the Gospel! if you continue this course, even though you now, through delusion, refuse to look at it, yet you will be *obliged* to look at it in the great reckoning day. How will it then appear to you, in the light of eternity! Professed Christian! if you support this evil, how will you meet it at the bar of God! Whether the benevolent institutions of the day that stand connected with such treason against Heaven, will be of more benefit than injury to the world, is certainly very questionable. Such rulers always display such crooked management and give such a sectarian turn and selfish direction to every thing under their control, that the general movement becomes a state of absolute rivalry against the jurisdiction of Christ.

Sir Isaac Newton, after examining the History of the Baptists, from the apostolic times downward, declared of them, (as Whiston informs us,) that they were the only community that had never symbolized with antichrist, (alluding to their uniform recognition of the exclusive jurisdiction of Jesus Christ,) and that "he was inclined to consider them as one of the two Witnesses of the Apocalypse.

“REASONS WHY BAPTISTS OUGHT TO TEACH THEIR DISTINCTIVE VIEWS . . . First, *it is a duty we owe to ourselves*. We must teach these views in order to be consistent in holding them. Because of these we stand apart from other Christians, in separate organizations. . . We have no right thus to stand apart unless the matters of difference have real importance; and if they are really important, we certainly ought to teach them.”

JOHN A. BROADUS

The Duty of Baptists To Teach Their Distinctive Views.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881).

“No religious denomination has a moral right to a separate existence unless it differs essentially from others. Ecclesiastical differences ought always to spring from profound doctrinal differences. *To divide Christians, except for reasons of gravest import, is criminal schism*. Separate religious denominations are justifiable only for matters of conscience growing out of clear scriptural precept.”

J. L. M. CURRY

A Baptist Church Radically Different From Paedobaptist Churches.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1889).

“There is something distinctive in the principles of Baptists. They differ from all other denominations; and the difference is so great as not only to justify, but to demand, their separate existence as a people . . . What distinctive mission have the Baptists, if this is not their mission? - to present the truth in love on the matters wherein they differ from Pedobaptists. What is there but this that justifies their separate denominational existence and saves them from the reproach of being schismatics? *If they have a right to denominational life, it is their duty to propagate their distinctive principles, without which that life cannot be justified or maintained.*”

J. M. PENDLETON

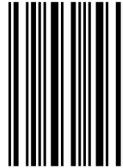
Distinctive Principles of Baptists.
(Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1882).

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